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# The Adult Dramaturgy of Youth Hockey: The Myths and Rituals of the “Hockey Family”

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The Adult Dramaturgy of Youth Hockey: The Myths and Rituals of the “Hockey Family”

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF  
EDUCATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SAINT THOMAS

SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA

By

Clare Elizabeth Grundtner Koch

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

2012

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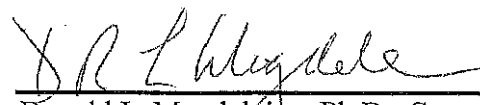
## UNIVERSITY OF SAINT THOMAS, MINNESOTA

## The Adult Dramaturgy of Youth Hockey: The Myths and Rituals of the "Hockey Family"

We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality.

We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions required by the final examining committee have been made.

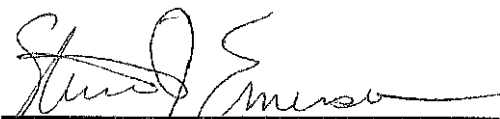
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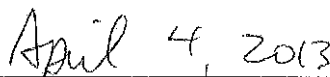
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## Abstract

Over the past 20 years, parent involvement in youth sports has changed significantly. Parents are increasingly involved in their child's sport: encouraging them to participate year round, attending all practices and games, investing thousands of dollars, and often telling the coach how to coach the team. Because of this time and financial commitment, parents now take on their own role in their child's sport. In this exploratory study, I looked at parental behavior and the relationship bonds made through youth hockey. The research was conducted in a Midwest town with both the local youth hockey program and High School Hockey program. Fifteen participants were researched, including: Athletic Directors, coaches, and parents.

Throughout this dissertation, a dramaturgical lens is utilized to analyze sports parents' behavior. Parents use hockey as a stage where the child learns life skills necessary for his future. They see practice as the rehearsal and the game as the performance. Parents rely on the coaches to teach the life lessons in the front stage, and parent's follow-up on these lessons in the backstage. When things do not go as the parents have scripted, they lose their dramaturgical focus and go off-script behaving inappropriately.

Parents and coaches must work together to co-direct the life lessons they want the athletes to take away from their sports participation. By clearly understanding each other's roles, parents and coaches can more effectively work together. Coaches' and parents' expectations are analyzed in this research, providing a better understanding of the expectations each group has of each other.

Parents have changed their focus from activities for their own enjoyment to focusing on their child's activities. The level of commitment required of hockey parents approximates the level of commitment required by sects and cults. The social connections parents make through

their membership in a “hockey family” is formed and social capital is created. This close-knit group contains many of the same characteristics of benign cults. By analyzing the data using religious and cult terminology, the dynamics of the “hockey family” is seen in new ways.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Abstract.....	4
Table of Contents.....	6
List of Figures.....	10
INTRODUCTION.....	11
CHAPTER ONE: Relevant and Analytic Literature Review .....	14
Topical literature.....	14
The History of Sports.....	14
The American Family .....	16
Pressures of the American Parent.....	17
Helicopter Parenting.....	18
Parents in a Pressure Cooker.....	19
Tiger Moms.....	20
Parental Behavior in Youth Sports.....	20
Current Research.....	20
Sports Violence in the Popular Media.....	22
Analytic Literature Review.....	26
Origins of Symbolic Interactionism .....	26
Generalized Other.....	28
Dramaturgy .....	28
Cults and Sects.....	29
Schism.....	31
Rituals and Myths.....	31
Social Participation.....	33
CHAPTER TWO: Research Methodology.....	36
Qualitative Research.....	36
Methodological Framework: Symbolic Interactionism.....	37
Case Research .....	37
Exploratory Study.....	39
Data Collection Methods.....	39
Study Sample.....	39
Participant Recruitment.....	41
Data Collection.....	42
Interviews.....	43
Data Analysis.....	44
Triangulation.....	45

Validity.....	46
Ethics and Confidentiality.....	46
Personal Bias.....	47
CHAPTER THREE: Unprecedented Years in Midway Youth Hockey.....	49
The National Context.....	49
Midway Hockey.....	52
Midway High School Hockey Program.....	53
High School Hockey Program Philosophy.....	55
Midway Bantam Hockey Program .....	56
Bantam Hockey Program Philosophy .....	59
Transition: Players moving up to Varsity from Bantam.....	62
Coaches Perspective.....	65
High School Parent Perspective.....	69
Bantam Parent Perspective.....	70
Reflection of the Season .....	71
High School Program .....	71
Bantam Program.....	72
CAPTER FOUR: Parents Staging Hockey as Character Development.....	73
Practices as Rehearsals, Games as Performances.....	75
Watching their Child's Success/Loss.....	76
Watching their Child Grow.....	77
Bonding with their Child .....	79
Being the "Good" Parent.....	81
Provide Support.....	82
Teach Appropriate Behavior.....	84
Give Space to Your Child.....	86
Control your Behavior: Others are Watching.....	87
Know when to step in and when to back off .....	91
Parents Co-Directing the Hockey Lessons Script.....	93
Be a Team Player .....	94
Work Hard.....	95
Show Good Sportsmanship .....	96
Learn Discipline & Structure .....	98
Be Responsible .....	99
Losing the Dramaturgical Focus.....	100
Inappropriate Behavior because of Referee Calls.....	102
Reacting to Injustices.....	104



Living Vicariously through their Child .....	105
Playing Referee from the Stands.....	108
Engaging in Physical Conflict .....	110
CHAPTER FIVE: Adult Backstage Reflections on Each Others' Roles.....	111
Coaches' Expectations of Parents.....	111
Parental Development throughout their Years in Hockey.....	112
Support your Child.....	116
Be Positive.....	117
Be Realistic.....	118
Be Supportive of the Coach.....	120
Communicate as Parent.....	122
Parents' Expectations of Coaches.....	124
Improve My Child's Hockey Skills .....	124
Be in Control and Coach.....	125
Communicate with the Athletes.....	127
Communicate Early with Parents.....	127
Play My Child.....	129
CHAPTER SIX: Dynamics of the 'Hockey Family' .....	131
Rites & Rituals of the Youth Hockey Cult.....	135
Get your Kids to the Game (and everything else).....	136
Be Financially Devoted.....	141
Do your Hockey "Job".....	145
Observe Proper Rink Behavior (or not) .....	147
Help Each Other Out.....	150
Participate in Social Gatherings .....	151
The Hockey Family as a Parenting Cult.....	153
Join the Community.....	153
Become Part of the Family.....	156
Develop Friendships.....	158
Perhaps get Shunned .....	160
Leave the Cult .....	161
The 2010-2011 Season as Sacrilege and Schism.....	162
CHAPTER SEVEN: Conclusions and Implications for Further Research .....	168
Conclusions.....	168
Parents Staging Hockey as Character Development.....	168
Adult Backstage Reflections on Each Others' Roles.....	171
Dynamics of the 'Hockey Family' .....	172

Implications.....	174
Youth Sports Organizations.....	175
Athletic Directors.....	176
Coaches.....	177
Parents.....	178
Officials.....	180
Educators.....	180
Recommendations for Further Research.....	181
References.....	184
Appendix.....	192
Appendix A: Recruitment Letter.....	192
Appendix B: Introductory Script at Parents Meeting.....	194
Appendix C: Consent Forms.....	195
Appendix D: Information Handout to Midway School Administration.....	203
Appendix E: Interview Questions.....	205
Consent.....	205
Coach.....	206
Parent.....	208
Appendix F: IRB Approval.....	210
Appendix G: Access.....	211
Appendix H: Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement.....	213

### **List of Figures**

Figure 1:	USA Hockey Age Classifications.....	50
Figure 2:	Differences between Bantam and High School Hockey Programs.....	58
Figure 3:	2010-2011 Hockey Progression.....	63

## **Introduction**

Researching the history of sports, the American family, and parental behavior in sports has caused me to reflect on my experiences as both an athlete and as a coach. I have spent my entire life playing sports. From my earliest memories, I recall throwing a ball with my parents, organizing pick-up games in the neighborhood, participating in the neighborhood sports teams, and eventually going on to play college softball. Organized physical activities and sports have always been a priority in my life.

When I was a child, I took dance classes, baton twirling classes, swimming lessons, and was also on teams for basketball, soccer, and t-ball. I remember my parents constantly being on the go, shuffling me, my sister, and two brothers to different activities. I truly don't remember a time when I was not part of an organized team or activity.

This busy lifestyle of constant activity was something I loved, and I thrived in this environment. I looked forward to my next activity and had positive support from my parents throughout the years. Never once did I feel like I was being pushed to participate or that I was under pressure from my parents to achieve something through my participation. My parents told all their children, myself included, that we could participate in any activity as long as we liked. Specifically, sports became a positive part of our lives; if and when we chose to leave an activity, my parents accepted the decision. I never felt pressure from them to do anything more than just enjoy the time I spent doing the activity.

As I moved through elementary, middle, and high school, I began to see the pressures some of my teammates were subjected to from their parents. I was amazed to find my teammates' and friends' parents yelling at them for missing a shot, not making the team, or not "getting the part." This behavior was foreign to me, because my parents were always supportive and did not demand anything in return.

As I continued through High School and went on to play college softball, the pressures surrounding my athletic participation grew. I had pressure from the school, classmates, coaches, and myself to perform well. I noted that while there is definitely a difference in expectations between college athletics and youth leagues, I was fortunate not to have the added pressure of my parents constantly surrounding me.

Currently, I am a licensed principal and physical education teacher. I have coached softball for six seasons at the High School level. Every year, I am amazed at the behavior of parents at sporting events. I have seen parents exhibit irrational and inappropriate behavior such as swearing at officials, confronting coaches, yelling at other parents, insulting their child's skills, making their child quit the team, and many other unwelcoming acts. This behavior not only may turn children away from sports, but it makes the atmosphere uncomfortable for many of the children on the team.

Coaches are often the individuals who must question whether the child athlete truly wants to participate in the sport, or if the parent is making their child athlete participate. Often these parents have unrealistic hopes and dreams for their child and constantly express it to him or her and the coach. When the coach does not see the same future for the child, parents can become upset and can even turn violent. This makes it very difficult for the coach to teach skills and enjoy coaching. Parental politics and demands have started to consume much of the coach's time.

As a coach myself, I find this trend upsetting. My experience with athletics as a youth was positive, with the outcome being fun and the activity beneficial. However, now I see a shift in society where children are often under the expectation to perform exceptionally well. If they

do not meet these standards, some parents act out in inappropriate ways. Realizing that inappropriate parental behavior does not begin without cause, I have researched the history of sports, the American family, and parental behavior in sports. Each of these topics has changed dynamically over the past 20 years, and these changes in the American culture have fostered an environment that has altered youth sports. This research examined parental behavior to identify the changing youth sports' atmosphere and further the knowledge on sports parents.

While researching, it became apparent that a change in the American culture has perpetuated the change in parental behavior in sports. Being able to look at both my research and my personal experience, I see that parents are motivated to do the best that they can for their children. Society has changed, and parents are more focused on their children and their children's activities than 20 years ago. Because of this, athletics has changed. Sports coaches, athletic directors, and parents must be aware of this changing parental role. This will allow them to fully understand the parental behavior and administer a quality experience for the athlete.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Relevant and Analytic Literature Review

#### Topical Literature

Upon analyzing the literature about coaching and youth sports, I have studied three main topics pertinent to this study. These are the history of sports, the history of the American family, and parental behavior in sports. Pulling from these three bodies of literature helped frame my research. The recent change in the youth sports environment has lead to increased expectations for both the athlete and his or her parents. This change has resulted in a new culture of sports parents.

**The history of sports.** Sports did not start out as a major part of the American culture. Lucas & Smith (1978) describe how during the first half-century of the nation's existence, life was a struggle. Time for personal pleasure and organized amusement was nearly nonexistent. During this early time in American history, settlers found fulfillment in working the land, establishing families, and worshiping God (p. 3). As American society became established and people began to have free time, sporting events such as horse racing, boxing, pedestrianism, and cockfighting became popular amusements (Swanson & Spears, 1978). These sporting events were popular throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

It was not until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that organized athletics, as we know them today, were established. Rowing was the first modern sport that was introduced into competition in 1843 (Swanson & Spears, 1978). The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a booming time for the invention of many organized sports, such as baseball, basketball, football, tennis, volleyball, and numerous other sports that we still play today. Around this time, colleges began introducing

athletics and physical education into their curriculum, and thus the invention of athletics as we currently know them began.

There were also organizations that helped introduce sports to young children. The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), the city playground movement, and the Public School Athletic League were developed to facilitate organized youth sports activities throughout the community (Lucas & Smith, 1978). All organized youth sports, most in conjunction with the rapid growth of U.S. cities, were born out of a need to transform society. Lucas and Smith explain how the playgroup movement grew from concern that urbanization and immigration were threatening American values. One of the main concerns of the movement was that the family's role in socialization was eroding so badly that the family could no longer teach morals to the children. It was felt that the city was corrupting the youth and this effect had to be countered. A group of reformers believed the answer to this problem was the transformation of unorganized, unstructured play in the streets into organized play that was adult supervised at the city playgrounds and gymnasiums (p.45-46). This tremendous push for organized youth sports changed the definition of play in American society.

Sports continued to grow, and have become an entity in their own right. Sports became a large attraction, and American society was willing to spend a great deal of money on this leisure activity. Between the years of 1959 to 1976, Americans spent 5.3 billion on athletic facilities with nearly every major city constructing either a multipurpose stadium or an arena, or both (Twombly, 1976, p. 286). The spectacle of sport had become a major part of the American culture and family. The middle class American had achieved the time and means to engage in spectator sports as a leisure activity. No longer was the game enough, fancy arenas and entertainment were needed to make the American sports fantasy complete (p .286).



The sports once known as merely fun activities that brought a change of pace have been transformed into elaborate contests played in multi-million dollar arenas. The salaries, time commitment, and pressures on athletes of all ages have skyrocketed. Sports are not as much about play as they are about the spectacle that surrounds the event. Every year this spectacle seems to grow at all levels of competition, including youth sports.

**The American family.** The American family has changed dramatically over the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Parenting decisions throughout the years have drastically affected the family structure. The traditional American family has evolved from one stay at home parent to two working parent households, changing the dynamics of the family. According to Harris (1991), at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a firm belief had already been established that the family was in decline and this decay was due to the growth of the industrial society. The strong family commitment and values seen in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were already facing a decline.

The 1930s was a transitional time in the American society. A previous trend of high birth rates and high death rates shifted to a pattern of low birth rates and low mortality. During this time, fertility was limited, fewer children were born, and people lived longer (Harris, 1991, p.110). This change in the American family affected women in particular.

American women gained a measure of personal freedom and economic power during the first half of the century. For the first time, average women had opportunities for employment outside the home. Although women were often exploited, overworked, and ill-paid, they still were able to have independence outside the home for the first time (Kay, 1972). This gain in personal freedom and economic power allowed more women to be out of the home on a daily basis.

The 1950s was the most family-oriented period of the century. This was helped along by the psychological impact of World War II and a desire to rebuild what was destroyed during the war. The American family entered into what is known as the “baby boom” (Harris, 1991). Marriage rates rose, families tended to have more children, and more time was focused on family life. Parents were active parts of their children’s daily lives.

As the baby boom children grew up and began to have children of their own, the lifelong family commitment again began to diminish. Kay (1972) explains how a small amount of married couples already regarded marriage as an arrangement that would hopefully last for a number of years, but not necessarily a lifetime.

In current society, the idea of serial marriages is rationalized with social tolerance and is generally approved. This trend has resulted in many broken households and a redefinition of the American family. The roles parents play in their children’s lives has changed over the last century. Parenting in the early part of the century, which focused majorly on fulfilling an active role inside the home, has now shifted to include many outside the home activities, such as sports and church.

***Pressures of the American parent.*** As parenting roles shifted from inside the home to the outside world, the pressures placed on American parents multiplied. Parental beliefs about what makes for an “ideal childhood” began to change. Ideas about what constituted “good parenting” evolved, causing a shift in the role of the parent. Bianchi, Robinson and Milkie (2006) discuss in their research that “good parents” provide constant protection and supervision, guidance, emotional investment, intellectual stimulation, and continual monitoring for their children. These parents place an emphasis on the investment and production of a “quality” child.

One way parents achieve this is by making children's activities the focal point of family life. Parental vigilance is required in the activities to make sure their children are receiving the maximum benefit from their participation. Parents must spend time negotiating with their children, coaching them to handle adult interaction, and teaching them to navigate their world and mold it to their needs. Parents believe that intense parental involvement in their children's activities will ensure later success in life for their child.

Parents are continually learning how to be parents. Hundreds of books, magazines, parent groups, blogs, lectures, etc. are dedicated specifically to learning how to be the "best" parent. Each of these outlets provides a resource for parents that may alter parenting style. These resources have redefined American society's definition of ideal parenting causing parents to be increasingly more involved in their children's activities. Because of this new trend, three new types of parents have emerged: "helicopter parents," "pressure cooker parents," and "tiger moms." Each of these parenting methods has its own characteristics that align with this new parenting idea.

*Helicopter parenting.* Helicopter parents do everything to protect, shelter, and be a part of their child's life outside the home. Sapadin (2009) describes that helicopter parents are so named because they hover closely to their child, rarely out of reach. This type of parent rushes in to prevent their child from any harm. The harm does not need to be physical but may also be perceived unfair treatment at school or in extracurricular activities. Helicopter parents often are seen picking up applications for their child, "helping" with their homework, "talking" to the coach, dropping off an assignment, checking on their child's grades, fixing a fight between friends, etc. These parents always have reasons why they are doing these activities instead of their child. David Sabine (as cited in Carson, 2010), PhD., describes three key attributes of

helicopter parents: “1) Inability to tolerate the idea that your child might experience something painful or negative, or that there might be a set-back for the child; 2) A belief that a primary parental responsibility is to minimize pain in your child’s life; 3) A belief that the child will grow up to be happy and fulfilled if the individual has as smooth a path through life as possible” (p. 1).

Although helicopter parents are often seen in a negative light, many of the valued attributes of 21<sup>st</sup> century American parents’ (such as constant protection and supervision, guidance, and continual monitoring) are exhibited in this type of parent. Helicopter parents do not see any problem in the way that they are parenting. They feel they are doing what is needed to produce “quality” children and prepare them in the best way for their life.

*Parents in a pressure cooker.* Pressure cooker parents are individuals who schedule their child for a variety of organized activities so that their child will be better prepared for life. Parents feel pressure to enroll their children in all these activities because they serve many purposes. For example, they consider the activities to be helping their child make friends, keeping them away from the television, teaching them lifelong skills, and providing something that “looks good” on college applications (Gilbert, 1999). Along with each activity comes pressure from parents and coaches. Often children apply self-pressure to perform as well.

Parents also feel pressures from society to ensure that their child is succeeding in all of the activities in which they participate. Often pressure cooker parents feel that their child’s achievements reflect on them. Boyd (2011) states that pressure cooker parents often act out of fear that their child is not doing enough and therefore will not succeed in life. This cycle leads to enrolling their child in more and more activities.

*Tiger moms.* In the book *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* (2011), Amy Chua writes about her traditional Chinese parenting. Tiger Moms are commonly obsessed with their child's success, seeing their children as extensions or reflections of themselves, and exhibiting conduct that others might classify as insane if not criminal. Some examples of Tiger Mom's behavior are prohibiting grades lower than an A, not allowing TV or play dates, and insisting their child perform perfectly at an activity. If these expectations are not met, consequences will be issued (Gibbs, 2011). Although Chua wrote the book as a Chinese-American parent, she states that parents from different cultures parent in the same way.

Since the book has been published, it has elicited a strong reaction from American parents. American parents fear that they are losing ground to China and other rising powers, and therefore, American children will not be successfully prepared to survive in the global economy (Paul & Murphy, 2011). Many American parents follow the same Tiger Mom philosophy of expecting the best from their children and not settling for anything else. Producing a "quality" child with all the attributes to succeed later in life is an important part of American parenting. Tiger Moms and dads bring this philosophy to the forefront of parenting styles.

### **Parental behavior in youth sports**

***Current research.*** Parental behavior in youth sports has received little attention from the research community. Many popular media reports, journal articles, league rules, and policies have focused on the changing parental behavior in youth sports; however, no research has been conducted at this time specifically focusing on this topic. The research that currently exists on parents and sports revolves around a few topics: 1) relationship between parent's physical fitness and youth fitness (Corder, van Sluijus, McMin, Ekelund, Cassidy, & Griffin (2010); O'Connor, Jago, Baranowski (2009)); 2) parent and youth relationships and the effect it has on youth sport

(and Carr (2009); Dorsch, Smith, & McDonough (2009)); 3) importance of parental support for youth athletes (Davison & Jago (2009); Keegan, Harwood, Spray, & Lavalley (2009)); and 4) youth sport stress and how parents play a role (Bois, Lalanne, & Delforge (2009); Harwood & Knight (2009)).

Two research reports have been published in the previous year that most closely relate to this topic. Research based out of Clemson University focused on positive coach and parent behavior being a significant predictor of positive player behavior. This study analyzed the different policies and procedures youth leagues have put into place that negatively affect the positive outcome of sports such as silent games (Arthur-Banning, Wells, Baker & Hegreness, 2009).

Another study was based out of the University of Minnesota, which looked at the effects of angry parents on youth sports participation. Using survey methods, this research focused on different types of angry behavior and which of these behaviors were seen most often. The focus of the research was on the youth and how their sports participation was effected by the angry parent (Omil & LaVoli, 2009).

The authors of both studies stated that limited research has been completed about parental behavior in athletics. However, there is a wealth of literature published in the popular media on these topics. My study differs from these studies because it focuses specifically on parental (not child) behavior and the specific reasons for such behavior. Both of the previous studies used quantitative research methods. My study is completed using qualitative methods where participants explain their behaviors.

*Sports violence in the popular media.* Sports violence has become an issue at all levels of athletic competition. Numerous reports of unacceptable behavior at sporting events have filled the media.

Imagine watching a father become incensed when his 10-year-old boy receives an elbow to the nose during a body check from another hockey player. Immediately, this irate parent screams at the coach to curtail the violence. When the coach skates off the ice, he is confronted by the enraged parent. After some verbal sparring, the agitated parent is asked to leave the premises. Later, the stressed father returns to the rink, challenges the coach again, and begins beating him while young athletes yell helplessly for the crazed parent to stop. It's too late. Two days later, a spokesperson for the hospital announces that the coach has died (Docheff and Conn, 2004, p.63)

This incident took place on July 5, 2000, in Reading, Massachusetts. The parent of a 10-year-old hockey player beat the coach to death. Sadly, this is not an isolated incident, but just one of many in the media in recent years. More examples can be cited: an assistant football coach and a 14-year old student were stabbed in a scuffle after football practice in Minneapolis, Minnesota; a father of a Little League player was sentenced to three years in prison for pointing a pistol at a coach in Palm Beach, Florida; a coach was fired after she took a meat cleaver into school, after an argument at a junior high school volleyball game, in Rockford, Illinois (Gehring, 2001).

Parents can play an important role in their children's sports participation. Experiences in sports are often dependent on parental support and influence, yet parents can also exert many

negative influences on their children's sports participation (Smoll, 1993). This behavior can lead to competitive stress, inhibit sport performance, and cause children to drop out of sports (Kidman, McKenzie, and McKenzie, 1999). Furthermore, participation in sports is already a stressful situation for most children. They are placed in an environment where their athletic ability is scrutinized by coaches, parents, and other athletes. Having parents who are unable to control their emotions only elevates this stressful situation. Not only are children anxious about their own athletic abilities, but they may also be worried about how their parents' behavior during athletic events.

Over the past five years, as Nack, Munson, and Dohrmann (2000) report, the stereotypes of the obnoxious Little League parent, the meddling soccer mom, the aggressive dad who stalks the sidelines at football games, and the guardian at the poolside deck at swim meets have become a larger presence. Often, children are seen to behave with greater civility than their parents. Parents are heard yelling instructions or making unsolicited remarks to their children as they participate in the games. The rise of inappropriate behavior and violence at youth games is well documented in the newspapers and magazines (Apache, 2004).

Children recognize the inappropriate behaviors demonstrated by their parents. They are put into situations where they must choose between continuing participation or quitting because of their parents' actions. According to a survey conducted in the early 1990s at Michigan State University, of the 20 million Americans children who participate in organized sports, about 14 million will quit before age 13. These children report they dropped out mostly because adults—particularly their own parents—have turned the playing of games into a joyless, negative experience (Nack, Munson, and Dohrmann, 2000).



In 2004, Docheff and Conn tried to answer the question, “What causes parents to misbehave at youth sporting events?” (p.64) Youth sports have been studied for years, and writers have determined possible reasons for violent parental behavior. These include parents who are: (a) living vicariously through the child; (b) having visions of stardom; (c) concerned about securing a college scholarship; (d) instilling family values; (e) providing professional role models; and (f) having a win-at-all cost attitude. Psychologists have said that one of the distinguishing marks of “obnoxious sports parents” is the presence of the inflated hopes they have for their children (Nack, Munson, & Dohrmann, 2000). These inflated hopes often do not follow the child’s ambitions. Because of parental motivations, children often feel obligated to play a particular sport instead of participating because they enjoy the activity. (Kidman, McKenzie, and McKenzie, 1999)

Parental behavior during sporting events has become so out of control that it has started to affect coaches, officials, and the overall sports programs.

Fred Engh, president of the National Alliance for Youth Sports (NAYS), which educates coaches and parents on the needs of young athletes, says that field reports from his organization’s 2,200 chapters in the U.S. reveal an alarming trend: In 1995 you could expect 5% of a crowd of parents to get out of line at a youth athletic event -- i.e., to embarrass their children or be abusive toward the kids, officials and coaches. Only five years later, you can expect 15% of the crowd to cross the line. ‘It borders on insanity,’ says Engh. ‘Every year I see more and more ugly things.’ (Nack, Munson and Dohrmann)

The problem has become so large that many youth leagues are struggling to find enough sports officials willing to “step into the fray” (Gehring, 2001). The National Association of

Sports Officials reported that 90 percent of the respondents stated a shortfall of officials in their state. The biggest reason stated for this pattern was a decline in sportsmanship by the parents, coaches, and players. The problem of fans, coaches, or players turning violent against officials is so threatening that many officials have turned to buying assault insurance (Docheff and Conn, 2004, p.64). Some 16 state legislatures have passed measures specifically mandating penalties for battery against sports officials (Gehring, 2001).

Though this pattern of violence and verbal abuse is documented in the media and seen at many sporting events, there is little research literature demonstrating that sports rage is increasing. Anecdotal evidence seems to indicate that sports rage is on the rise (Docheff and Conn, 2004). Substantial research has been directed at enhancing the quality of children's sport experiences, but little research has focused on enhancing the experience of parents and facilitating positive parental involvement.

The message in the literature seems to be consistently strong: Parents play a critical role in their child's sport and should not be excluded. While the actions of a few parents seem to warrant extreme 'push' measures, such as severely minimizing or even eliminating parent involvement or requiring completion of seminars, research suggests that a 'pull' strategy that encourages positive parent involvement in youth sports may be more likely to succeed. ... They need to acknowledge the important role that each parent plays and empowers parents to do the right thing. It seems to be important to establish a culture where the organization, coaches, referees, players and their parents are expected to do the right thing. It seems to be important to establish a culture where the organization, coaches, referees, players and their parents all share responsibility for creating a high-quality sport experience (Kanters, 2002, p.2).

Parents, spectators, and coaches must recognize that sports are only one part of a child's life. Stewart (1997) states that, "the parents of athletes can either be a valuable source of support or an unbelievable origin of stress and frustration" (p.1). Stewart's study showed the need for parents and coaches at all levels of participation to communicate openly and often. Through open communication, parents are more likely to understand their own child's sport's performance and behave appropriately at their child's game.

### **Analytic Literature Review**

**Origins of symbolic interactionism.** Building on theory from George Herbert Mead, Charles Cooley, W.I. Thomas, John Dewey, and other theorists, Herbert Blumer (1937) coined the term *symbolic interactionism*. It consists of three premises: "1) human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them; 2) The meaning of things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows; 3) these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters." (Collins, 1994 p.304) It is through the process of interacting with one another that people give meaning to their experiences.

These meanings are concrete and not accidental or secondary. "Symbolic interactionism sees meanings as social products, as creations that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact." (Blumer, 1969, p.4) To understand behavior, we must understand meaning and the process through which it is formed (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

It is also through this interpretive process that the individual constructs an image of "self." This is the way people define or see who they are. "In constructing or defining self, people attempt to see themselves as other see them by interpreting gestures and actions directed

toward them and by placing themselves in the role of the other people” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p.29).

George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) identified two levels of interaction in which individuals can engage. First, “non-symbolic interaction” occurs when one responds to an action of another, without interpreting the action. For example, if someone was about to hit you, and you raise your arm to block them, you are engaging in non-symbolic interaction. However, if you were to know the person was going to hit you, and you try to determine the reason behind the action before moving, you are engaging in “symbolic interactionism.” It is through the “presentation of gestures and a response to the meaning of those gestures” that symbolic interaction takes place (Blumer, 1969, p. 8). For people to understand one another, the meaning of the gestures needs to be the same for both people.

Blumer (1969) believed that the meaning of gestures is interpreted along Mead’s (1934) triad of meaning. “The person who responds (to the gestures) organized his responses on the basis of what the gestures mean to him; the person who presents the gestures advances them as indications or signs of what he is planning to do as well as of what he wants the respondents to do or understand. Thus, the gesture has meaning for both the person who makes it and for the person to whom it is directed. When the gesture has the same meaning for both, the two parties understand each other” (p. 8). Blumer goes on to add, “the parties to such interaction must necessarily take each other’s role” (p. 9). Only by being able to step into another’s role can effective communication and symbolic interaction take place.

When people interact and share experiences, they develop common definitions or “shared perspectives” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p.27). Because all individuals apply different meanings

to a “shared perspective,” the meaning is always up for negotiation. When people disagree about these meanings, conflicts arise and new definitions may be formed causing change.

**Generalized other.** George Herbert Mead (1934) described how an actor learns appropriate social behaviors by stepping outside him or herself and taking on the role of the other members of society. By doing so, actors learn the specific values and expectations of the community as a whole. When actors engage in the process of self-reflection, they take on the perspective of the generalized other. By taking on the role of the generalized other, the actor prepares him or herself for social interactions. This allows the actor to anticipate what is expected of them from the other members of their community.

**Dramaturgy.** Erving Goffman (1959) describes dramaturgy in his work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Goffman sees all human interaction much in the same way he views a play. He uses the theatrical metaphor to describe how people create, maintain and destroy a common understanding of reality through their interactions with one another. He sees the individual person as always in relationship to society as a whole. The actions they engage in can be viewed and analyzed using the same methods as viewing and analyzing a play.

Goffman (1959) uses the terms “front stage” and “backstage” to describe different areas in which performances take place. For Goffman, “front stage” is the place where the performance takes place, with the audience present. The role the actor plays is relative to the scene and the situation. In my study described below, front stage is the hockey rink and any activities related to hockey. On the front stage, actors highlight and emphasize the aspects they want to convey the most and conceal aspects they do not want their audience to see; the actor guides and controls the impressions the audience forms. The actor’s activities and behavior are

therefore altered based on his performance. The role the parent must play is relative to the scene and the actor's situation in it. Not only do parents become the actors, but they also take on the roles of director and playwright.

The backstage, on the other hand, takes place behind the scenes. The audience is not present, and the actor can step out of character and behave in a manner unlike the role necessary for the front stage. The backstage is where individuals can be their real selves. Here, they are able to step out of their roles and can act spontaneously.

**Cults and sects.** Hockey parents' conduct can be seen as emulating behavior seen in cults and sects. Ernest Troeltsch (1931) in his work, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, expanded on Max Weber's church-sect typology. The basic premise of church-sect theory is that there is a continuum along which religion falls. Troeltsch described three types of religious behavior: churchly, sectarian, and mystical. Richard Niebuhr (1929) in his work, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, continued the church-sect theory by placing church and sect on two opposite poles of a continuum.

Howard Becker (1932) extended church-sect theory by suggesting a continuum of religious organizations from church to denomination to sect to cult. In this continuum, he outlined characteristics of each group. The type of religious group focused on in this study is the cult.

A cult is usually defined as a small informal group lacking a definite authority structure, somewhat spontaneous in its development (although often possessing a somewhat charismatic leader or group of leaders), transitory, somewhat mystical

and individualistically oriented, and deriving its inspiration and ideology from outside the predominant religious culture. (Richardson, 1993, p.349)

The definition of cult has changed throughout the years. Although we tend to associate cults with rebellious actions and beliefs, not all cults fit this stereotype. An internationally known expert on cultic groups, Rick Ross (2012), breaks cults into two distinct groups: destructive cults and benign cults. He describes destructive cults as “groups with an absolute authoritarian figure at the top of a pyramid scheme of authority where there is virtually no accountability for that leader.” Destructive cults harm, manipulate, hurt, and often brainwash their members. The leader does not truly care about the well-being of the members, often exploiting and abusing them for personal benefit.

Ross goes on to describe benign cults as, “any group of people that are intensely devoted to a person, place or thing.” Benign cults are non-injurious, and the relationship between the follower and the cult is harmless. The role of a benign cult is to help fill the emotional wants and needs of their followers in a positive way. Followers in benign cults receive a sense of satisfaction, accomplishment, belonging, and enlightenment from their membership. Benign cults are never destructive and never harm their members physically or mentally. The leaders in benign cults are accountable to the group and value the feedback of the members (Ragas & Bueno, 2002). In this study, I will identify cultic behavior of parents in regard to their participation in hockey looking at both destructive cults and benign cults.

Cults, like churches need to develop a devoted group of members. In the book *Why Conservative Churches are Growing* (1986), Dean Kelley discusses a theory on how church groups grow. He states that “human beings cannot live without trying to make sense of their

experience, to find the meaning in it” (p. 174). The group must work towards an ultimate meaning that they are going to embrace and embody. He found that when church groups grow, it is because there is a high-demand from the community that is capable of “changing the lives” of the members. As the level of demand decreased, there was a decline in the social strength of the community. He found one of the principles that must be followed for the group to grow is to “make high demands of those admitted to the organization that bears the faith, and they do not include or allow to continue within it those who are not fully committed to it” (p.176). Throughout this study I will identify ways in which these same principles allow the hockey community to continue to grow their membership and remain strong.

**Schism-** Schism occurs when a social group is divided because of a crisis or conflict. For this to occur, according to Bruce Lincoln (1989), there has to be a violation of the groups accepted norms. This violation provokes a crisis in the group. The group attempts to resolve the crisis but is unsuccessful resulting in the group dividing. The individuals that challenged the group norms withdraw from the other members of the society they had previously been a part and form their own social group. This leaves the previous social group weakened. In this study, I will identify what role schism has on the hockey community.

**Rituals and myths.** The way that society controls individuals’ behaviors is through social rituals. A ritual is a moment of extremely high social density, such as a church service. Social density is the number of people engaged in an activity. The more members of society that participate in the ritual, the stronger the ritual becomes. Individuals simultaneously focus their attention on the same activity, and the ideas that are present become representative of the entire group. The ideas developed and reinforced through rituals become agents to direct



individual social lives. This is why people do not need to be in the presence of others for society to exert its influence. (Collins, 1985, p.190-191)

Durkheim (1938) wrote that by interacting with others and forming patterns of regular social relationships, people are reminded of the greater purpose in life than their own individual self-interests. However, he considers this periodic insight to be at constant odds with basic nature because the focus is usually on individual self-interest. Durkheim is interested in how societies “create” people, how individuals are influenced and controlled by conforming to societal ways. “Ways of acting, thinking, and feeling...are not only external to the individual, but are, moreover, endowed with coercive power, by virtue of which they impose themselves upon them, independent of his individual will” (p.2). This is accomplished because people are born into preexisting societies and a society’s ways of acting, thinking, and feeling exist independently of any one person. Individuals must be socialized to the greater society. This is learning how to act, think, and feel in ways that support the shared rules and practices of a group or society. This is accomplished through regulation and integration.

Regulation is the institutional level of socialization. It provides many with a sense of duty and the proper channels to pursue goals. This is experienced in the duties people have to the group and the feelings of obligation experienced. The more effective the rules are in restricting individual behavior, the more regulated a society. This is achieved by defining moral rules, communicating and clarifying them, and enforcing them. An example of this is a government with the legislative body that sets laws and then supports public policy to enforce the laws.

Integration occurs in the everyday interactions in groups. Groups learn through collective activities. The more regular and intense these experiences, of acting together in a group, the more integrated a society. The collective activities reinforce strong social ties, shared beliefs, values and norms, and shared emotions that allow members to feel duty and attachment to the group. Durkheim (1933) found that, “when individuals who are found to have common interests associate, it is not only to defend these interest, it is...to have the pleasure of communing, to make one out of many, which is to say, finally, to lead the same moral life together” (p.15).

Durkheim (1933) believes that society’s regulation and integration can change with time. This can result in two situations; egoism and anomie. He explains egoism as when the group’s collective activities have declined in number and intensity, leaving individual members isolated from the actions of society. The individuals become isolated and their attachment to social ties and their societal obligations wither away, leading them to withdraw from group life. On the other hand, Anomie, defined as a state in which norms are confused, clear or not present, develops when society does not provide enough regulation. Then, shared beliefs are lost and constant conflict and anarchy succeeds.

**Social participation.** Robert Putnam (2000), in the book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, discusses social capital theory. He states, “The core idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value. Just as a screwdriver (physical capital) or a college education (human capital) can increase productivity (both individual and collective), so too social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups” (p.19). Social capital refers to the connections that individuals make with one another. Through these

social networks, bonds are made and “norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness arise from them” (p.19). These social bonds are an important part of the American society.

Theorist L.J. Hanifan’s (1916) was the first to write about the idea of social capital. For Hanifan, social capital included tangible substances such as good will, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse that count most in the daily lives of people. When people come into contact with others they will be social and their interactions will result in an accumulation of social capital. This social capital will fulfill their social needs and may result in substantial improvement of living conditions in the whole community. The community as a whole will benefit by the cooperation of all its parts, while the individual may receive the advantages of help, sympathy, and fellowship from his or her neighbors (Hanifan, 1916).

Putnam (2000) expanded on Hanifan’s theory stating that social capital helped build the American society. However, he found that over the last generation social capital has been drastically decreasing. Americans are not engaging in community social events such as bowling clubs, church groups, political organizations, Rotary, NCAA, or etcetera as much as they had previously. The trend has moved from social organization involvement, where individuals attend meetings and events with one another, to “mail order” involvement where people sign-up for organizations, yet their only involvement is through written communication. This trend has had a disturbing effect on American society. Although Americans are still joining organizations, their connections are to “common symbols, common leaders, and perhaps common ideals, but *not* to each other” (Putnam, p.52).

Social capital in America peaked in the early 1960s and began to decline by 1969. Since then, the “trend began to accelerate after 1985: in the ten short years between 1985 and 1994,

active involvement in community organizations in this country fell by 45 percent” (p.60). The decline in community organizations has had an impact on the way Americans interact with one another. Throughout this study, parents’ social connections were analyzed, as they related to sports. According to the participants, this generation of parents has become more actively involved in their child’s athletics than their parents’ generation. The social capital that is created through parental involvement in their child’s activity is a new area of social capital that needs to be analyzed.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Research Methodology

#### Qualitative Research

Qualitative research involves an inquiry method which emphasizes collecting descriptive data in a natural setting. This type of research relies heavily on participant observation and in-depth interviewing as a means to gather descriptive data with the goal of developing a deep understanding of the subject. Often the data collected is termed “soft” because it is rich in descriptions, but difficult to analyze with statistical procedures (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) describe qualitative research as being naturalistic, descriptive, concerned with process, inductive, and concerned with capturing the participant’s perspective (p. 4). First, qualitative research is naturalistic because the researcher spends considerable time in the setting he or she is studying. The researcher is concerned with the context of the situation and gains this insight through participant observation. Second, the data collected must be rich in descriptive details. Data that is collected through interview transcripts, field notes, photographs, videotapes, documents, memos, and other records provide a full illustration of the situation that the researcher can then analyze. Third, qualitative researchers are concerned with the process of how people make meaning of their life. Fourth, qualitative research is inductive in nature. Central themes emerge from analyzing the data and the theory is grounded in the data that has been gathered. Finally, qualitative researchers are concerned with understanding the participant’s perspective. I chose to use qualitative research for my study because very little research has been done on sports parents. After looking through the minimal research on sports parents and determining that I wanted to learn more about their behavior, I concluded the only

way to gather the descriptive data needed to adequately perform this study was through qualitative research.

**Methodological framework: symbolic interactionism.** In setting up my design, I chose to use symbolic interaction as the methodological framework for my research because symbolic interactionists try to understand “the meaning people give to their experience and their process of interpretation” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p.27). My research required the understanding of parents’ understanding (meaning) of sports and the behavior that results. The parents’ meaning is developed through their interactions with coaches, children, athletes, and other parents. By using symbolic interactionism as a methodological framework, I examined how parents interpreted the meaning of their child’s participation in sports and how it differs between individuals.

Symbolic interactionism has its roots in the Chicago School. The Chicago School was a group of sociological researchers during the 1920s and 1930s at the University of Chicago. This group of researchers saw the importance of studying social interaction. They used personal observations as a main tool in their research, leading to the development of the qualitative research method. (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p.8-9)

**Case research.** Case study is a research design in qualitative methods. In case research, an issue is studied through one or more cases in a specific setting. Case research requires an investigator to explore using in-depth data collection such as: observations, interviews, documents, and reports of the given case. Data collection during case studies is extensive and requires considerable time at the case site and working with individuals involved in the case.

The end result of case research is for the researcher to interpret the meaning that comes from learning about the issue of the case or unusual situation (Creswell, 2007).

Case research can be described like a funnel. The research starts at the wide end with the researcher scouting for possible locations and individuals that might be sources of data. When the location is identified, the feasibility of the site and data sources must be analyzed to see if they would produce adequate data. Data collection begins and decisions are made concerning the direction of the study. The researcher must determine how to distribute his or her time, who to interview, and what to explore in depth. Old ideas may be thrown out and new topics explored. The researcher must continually modify the design and choose procedures as he or she learns more about the topic. The work develops a focus. Questions are formulated and in-depth data collection and analysis takes place (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Because case researchers cannot observe all activities, interview everyone or review all documents, they must rely on internal sampling to ensure that the sample studied is wide enough so that the diversity of types is explored. Researchers also make decisions based on the quality of data produced. Some participants are more willing to share information, have more experience in the setting, or are more insightful about what goes on. These participants become your “key informants” and more time may be focused on them than other members of the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p.68). Decisions also must be made in regard to the time sampling. The researcher must decide when to observe games, parent discussions, meetings, etc. The researcher must always ask, “If I do it this way, what am I missing? What am I gaining?” (p.68)

One modern day exemplar similar to my research methods is “With the Boys,” by Gary Alan Fine. In his research, Fine used participant observation, surveys, and semi-structured interviews with the parents of Little League baseball teams across the county. Symbolic

interaction is the chosen methodological framework Fine used in his research, with case research as his method. I have chosen to use the same methodological framework and methodology in my research. I believe this method provided me with the richest data to analyze the parents' behavior and allowed me to truly understand parents' perspectives when it came to their child's sports participation.

**Exploratory study.** After a thorough search of published qualitative and quantitative research and peer reviewed journals, I discovered there was minimal research that had been conducted on sports parents. Although the topic was very well discussed in newspapers and magazines, researchers had not studied sports parents. As there was no previous research to help guide me, I did an exploratory study. Marshall & Rossman (1999) describe that exploratory studies investigate little-understood phenomena, identify or discover important categories of meaning and generate hypotheses for further research (p.33). This allowed me the latitude to look at all the data that was gathered through a grounded theory approach to generate the data themes that emerged.

### **Data Collection Methods**

**Study sample.** During my research, I looked at a Bantam team and High School program in a town that I will call "Midway." I chose Midway because it is located in the Midwest in a state where hockey is valued. The town has a Youth Hockey Association that provides hockey education and development programs for students in the local school district. Children can start participating in youth hockey at the age of 5 with organized teams through senior year in High School. The Youth Hockey Association is the feeder program for the High School Hockey Program. The High School Hockey program is a school sponsored activity. The



program has a 50-50 winning average with their current head coach. The last few years they have had more losses than wins, yet they are still considered a “middle of the road” program.

The reason I chose this program was that it gave me access to an average program. I started by approaching the High School Athletic Director with my research idea. We had several meetings to talk about the logistics of the research, identifying individuals whom I would access and to familiarize the Athletic Director with the process. I put together an information handout for the Midway school administration (Appendix D). The Athletic Director presented the information to both the school administration and the superintendent. When they were satisfied with the research design, I was given permission through a consent form (Appendix F) to begin my research with the Midway High School Hockey program.

The High School Athletic Director graciously offered to connect me to the Midway Youth Hockey association. I approached the Midway Hockey Association coaching coordinator who had already had several conversations with the High School Athletic Director and felt confident in my research plan. He signed the access form for the Midway Youth Hockey Association (Appendix F) after consulting with the Midway Youth Hockey Association Board of Directors and put me in contact with the Bantam A hockey coach with whom I would have the most contact.

These two case sites provided me access to parents of hockey-playing children of various ages, which allowed me to gain a more complete understanding of the behavior across the age range. I focused my research on the High School parents and Bantam A parents. By evaluating parents at each level of competition, I was able to gain a broader understanding of the parents' characteristics and was able to compare this data in the analysis section.

**Participant recruitment.** I began recruiting participants at the beginning of the 2010-2011 hockey season. I began first by inviting all the coaches at both the High School and Bantam levels to participate in my research. All of the coaches were already aware of the research through the Athletic Director and/or Coaching Coordinator and had expressed interest in participating in the research. I gave each of them a recruitment letter and allowed them to make a decision if they indeed wanted to participate. All five coaches contacted me and volunteered to be part of the study.

At the High School level, I began my recruitment at the beginning of the school year parents' meeting. I attended the meeting to learn about the program and, with permission from the boys head hockey coach, introduced myself and explained a little about the study (Appendix B). I proceeded to hand out a recruitment letter (Appendix A) to all parents in attendance and asked them to consider participating. They were given the option of calling, e-mailing, or handing the back page of the letter to me or the head coach to indicate their interest in being a part of the research project. In total, seven parents expressed interest in being part of the research. All seven High School parents were interviewed. Two of the parents, a husband and wife, opted to be interviewed together.

A similar procedure was used to recruit Bantam parents. I attended the first parent meeting for Bantam A players. At that meeting, the Bantam head coach allowed me to introduce myself and my study to the Bantam A players. I proceeded to hand out the same recruitment letter to the Bantam parents as I had to the High School parents. They also had the option of calling, e-mailing, or handing the back page of the letter to me or the head coach to express interest in being a part of the research project. In total, four Bantam parents volunteered to be part of the research. All four of those parents were interviewed as part of the research.

In total five coaches and eleven parents were interviewed as part of the research. Participants were made up of four High School coaches, one Bantam coach, seven High School parents, and four Bantam parents. All of the coaches were male. Five of the parents were male and six of the parents were female.

**Data collection.** As a coach myself, I have had years of experience watching the behavior of parents in the stands. I have observed a shift in parental behavior since the time when I was playing to the time I was coaching. I knew the dynamics of a sports arena and felt confident that my personal experience would give me insight into identifying themes in my research. I began my data collection by interviewing the Athletic Director. I wanted to gain a better understanding of the program itself and learn specifics about this program's dynamics.

After interviewing the Athletic Director, I then asked both head coaches for interviews. I purposely wanted to conduct these interviews early in the season as I felt they would give me insights into the research questions I wanted to pose to the parents. This opportunity allowed me to gain insights about the program before interviewing parents. Being that my research was exploratory, I knew these main players on the team would be able to help guide my research.

After these initial interviews were conducted, I began participant observation. I attended parents' meetings of both High School and Bantam leagues and gathered data at both events. I then attended practices at both the High School and Bantam levels. Finally, I attended games at the High School and Bantam level to observe parents' behavior. I used this initial data to help develop my first round of parent interview questions. Throughout this time, I also concluded my interviews with the remaining coaches.

After I had developed my parent interview questions (Appendix E), I arranged for interviews with the eleven parents. These interviews took place between December 2010 and

January 2011. As the season was still in its first half, I was able to gain a fresh perspective of the parent's decisions early in the season.

After I finished my first round of interviews, I purposely waited until the end of the season to do a second round. I analyzed the first round of interviews to identify data themes and to help develop further interview questions. During this time, I continued to attend games and parent meetings to observe and gather data. Once the season was coming to an end, I invited all of the coaches and parents to participate in a second interview. All 16 participants were interviewed a second time between the end of February 2011 and March 2011.

**Interviews.** As previously mentioned, all parents and coaches at the High School and Bantam levels were invited to participate in the research. I invited all five of the coaches to participate in the research personally. All agreed to participate. The parents were invited at their respective parents' meeting to participate through a brief explanation and recruitment letter. Of the 29 sets of High School parents and 13 sets of Bantam parents, eleven volunteered to participate in the research. Parents used the form on the recruitment letter, phone calls, and e-mail to express interest in participating in the study. Of the individuals that volunteered, all were included in the research.

All interviews were conducted over the course of the 2010-2011 hockey season. I began each initial interview by going over the consent form (Appendix C) with the participant. I had the participant read the form and then followed-up with consent questions (Appendix E). Each participant had to verbally explain: What the study was about? What they would be asked to do for the study? What risks were involved? How was I going to keep their information confidential? What was the voluntary nature of the study? And did they have any concerns

about participating? After I answered any questions about the study itself, the participant signed the consent form.

We then began the interview. I used a semi-structured interview technique to gather data from the participants. I used open-ended questions to guide the interview. I was able to ask follow-up questions to probe for more information and clarify meanings. All participants allowed me to tape record the interviews for transcription. I also took notes to capture nonverbal communications.

The initial interviews took between 45-60 minutes to conduct. At the end of the interview, I asked the parents if there was anything else that I should know about hockey parents and athletics. At this time, most parents and coaches did not add anything to this final question; those that did simply summarized many of the points of the previous questions.

The second round of interviews did not take as long as the first. Most of these interviews took between 30-45 minutes. I asked questions probing for more information based on the themes that emerged in the first set of interviews (Appendix E). Participants were more willing to share their personal feelings in the second round of interviews.

**Data analysis.** Themes and patterns began to emerge as I conducted the participant observations and interviews. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) describe data analysis as the process of “working with the data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them, and searching for patterns” (p.159). Being that this was an exploratory study, I had the ability to truly allow the data to lead me as a researcher.

I began data analysis immediately after each interview as I listened to the audio recording and made notes of my own feelings, ideas, and initial themes that emerged. I then sent the

recordings to my transcriber. Upon receiving the transcriptions back, I again listened to the recording as I read the transcription and corrected any discrepancies. My initial notes on the interviews were invaluable as I began coding.

My initial coding was based on themes that emerged from my notes during the data collection. The identified and coded themes were parental roles, expectations, rewards, and complaints. Though these presented an important key to understanding sports parents, the themes did not explain the participant perspective I was aiming to understand. These codes did, however, give me great insight into sports parents and was valuable in the research.

Themes of community, rituals, and family were identified throughout the first set of data, yet, this was an area on which I needed more information. I reformatted the second set of interview questions to yield more information about the parents themselves and their relations to hockey. This provided much richer data on the topics above. After receiving the second set of interview questions, I coded the second interview question with the initial coding set. I then coded all the interview data using community, rituals, and family as my codes.

My third mode of data analysis was to go back through all of my field notes and observer comments and code the data utilizing the two coding themes. Each mode of data analysis produced quotes, ideas and themes which I was able to apply to my theoretical analysis.

**Triangulation.** Triangulation is the combination of multiple research techniques used together to establish a full understanding of the topic. The term triangulation originally comes from “the application of trigonometry to navigation and surveying.” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 115) It was first applied to the social sciences to demonstrate the need of having more than one source of information to establish a fact. In qualitative data, triangulation came to mean having multiple sources of information leading to “a fuller understanding of the phenomena” being

studied. Bogdan & Biklen (2003) describe four different ways to triangulate research using; 1) multiple subjects, 2) multiple researchers, 3) different theoretical approaches, and 4) different data-collecting techniques

Throughout my study, I used a research design that allowed for the data to be triangulated. First, as Bogdan & Biklen (2003) suggest, I chose subjects from multiple research sites with differing roles. As described previously, I interviewed the High School Athletic Director, coaches at both the High School and Bantam levels, and parents at both the High School and Bantam levels. Data was then triangulated amongst the information collected from all the different groups. By collecting data at two different levels and using multiple subjects at each of the levels, I was able to triangulate my findings between the sites themselves. I also included different data collection methods (interviews with coaches and parents and observation); by doing this, I automatically built triangulation into my research.

**Validity.** Validity “is about accuracy and whether the operationalization is correctly indicating what it’s supposed to” (Nardi, 2006, p.58). The goal of validity is to accurately describe the subject or research in a truthful way. Because this topic is virtually unexplored, I have designed my methods to ensure validity in the research by cross-checking findings among different data collection techniques. I did this through cross checking coaches’ and parents’ interviews compared to my participant observation data. Although validity will not be able to be compared to previous research studies, this study will allow for a base understanding of this topic.

**Ethics and confidentiality.** Ethics in research, according to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), are “the principles of right and wrong that a particular group accepts at a particular time” (p. 48).

When working with human subjects, as I was in this research, it required informed consent and the protection of informants from harm.

These guidelines attempt to insure that:

1. Informants enter research projects voluntarily, understanding the nature of the study and the dangers and obligations that are involved.
2. Informants are not exposed to risks that are greater than the gains they might derive.

(Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p.48)

Further, universities have institutional review boards (IRBs) to ensure research is conducted with proper consent and safety for the participants.

Confidentiality is important throughout research, to ensure subjects are protected and able to speak freely. Nardi (2006) states, “confidentiality needs to be emphasized when information identifying respondents can be linked to their specific answers and is revealed only to the researchers for the main goals of the project” (p.35). This was especially important in my research because participants were volunteering personal information in their responses. In order to insure anonymity in reporting, I assigned pseudonyms to all participants, schools, and other potential identifiers throughout the research.

**Personal bias.** Having coached High School sports for the past six years, I have definite opinions about appropriate parental behavior. I have experienced parents who have been overly supportive in both positive and negative ways. I have also seen parents become so irate (either at their child or their child’s coach) that their behavior has resulted in them being reprimanded.



My experiences playing, coaching, and teaching have all helped form my personal opinions about the role of sports, the parents and athletes involved, and appropriate behavior at sporting events. Throughout my study, I verified my analysis with my dissertation chair to ensure that I was aware of and continued to examine my personal bias. Throughout the research, I aimed to expose any and all of my personal biases so that they posed the least threat possible to my study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Unprecedented Years in Midway Youth Hockey**

Hockey across the United States is a sport that requires dedication from not only the players but also their parents and entire family. Starting at a young age, parents are lacing up their child's skates and sending them onto the ice. Often, this practice occurs at the same time the children are beginning to walk. Hockey is a way of life for many families. Fathers, grandfathers, and great grandfathers have participated in the sport and look forward to passing the tradition down to their children.

#### **The National Context**

The United States Hockey Association is the governing body for hockey in America. Each state is divided up into districts, and districts are divided up into associations. Association boundaries are loosely based on school district boundaries. That means children can participate either based on their home address or the school district the child attends. Many parents are concerned about ensuring their child participates in certain associations as not all are considered equal. Parents will move or enroll their child in another school district solely to ensure their child is able to participate in what they consider to be the best hockey association.

Organized youth leagues begin as young as five years old and require active involvement from parents. In many associations across the country, parents serve as volunteer coaches and assistant coaches. The United States Hockey Association provides a coaching education program with various levels to help train coaches and ensure compliance with the rules. Each local association is run by a board of directors mostly comprised of volunteer parents.

Children begin to participate in their local association as young as five years of age (see Figure 1). Many of these players will have had some form of ice skating lessons before they enroll in Mini-Mites either formally through lessons or through instruction from their parents. Mini-Mites are comprised of five and six year olds, with an emphasis on development and having fun. The practices and games are in-house (played at their own rink against their own association) and players are grouped with other players of similar ability. Practice occurs two days a week throughout the season and ten official games are organized.

#### USA Hockey Age Classifications

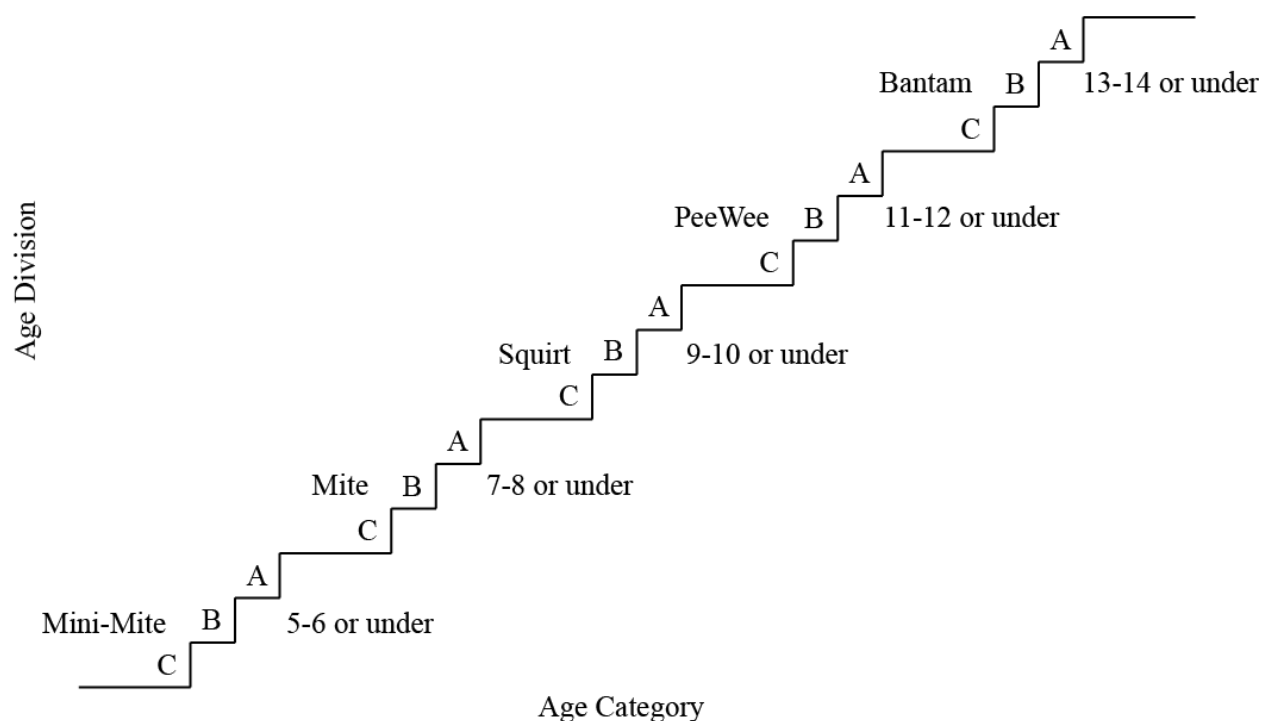


Figure 1

Children advance from Mini-Mites to Mites when they are seven and eight years of age. Games are still in-house but consist of more structured practices where skill development is stressed. Mites practice three days a week and fourteen in-house games are organized. Emphasis is still on skill development and having fun. Players must register for the appropriate

age level. Coaches and evaluators may move players up to the Squirt level based on their skill level.

Players progress to the Squirt level when they are nine and ten years old. This is the first level where they begin to travel and compete against other teams. Squirts participate in no more than thirty-five games per season. Throughout the season, they may travel across the state for games and tournaments. Parents are responsible for providing their child's travel to game and practice sites. At the end of the year, teams participate in the district Squirt tournament. At this level, players are split into "A", "B", and "C" teams, which divide players by skill level and determine the type of competition they will face.

"A" teams are comprised of the most skilled players at a given level. "A" teams face the best competition from other associations. Most of the players on the A team have already played in their age division for one year as either "B" or "C" team members. In general, the first year in an age division players are placed on the "B" or "C" team and the second year, they advance to the A team. Because of this pattern, often entire teams of players advance as a group moving from Squirt B to Squirt A, PeeWee B to PeeWee A, Bantam B to Bantam A.

When players are eleven and twelve, they begin playing Pee wee hockey. Players are divided into A, B and C teams and play games and tournaments throughout the state. Competition becomes more intense. Players participate in an end of year district Pee wee tournament. Generally, associations see a decrease in the number of teams from the Squirt to the Pee wee level.

Bantam is the pinnacle of the youth hockey program. Bantam players are thirteen and fourteen years old, essentially eighth and ninth graders. All of the training from Mini-Mites throughout the levels is showcased in the Bantam team. Players and parents look forward to

this year of hockey because they know the next step for these players will be the High School Hockey programs, which are not a part of the youth association structure. Districts have “A”, “B” and “C” Bantam teams. The goal at this level is to be on the Bantam A team, especially at fourteen years of age. Teams play games and tournaments throughout the state and end the year with the district tournament. If they win at the district level, they may advance to the Bantam state tournament. Figure one shows the USA Hockey Association age classifications.

Once players have completed Bantam hockey, there are many options. Most players choose to participate in High School Hockey starting in tenth grade. From High School, players may advance to junior hockey or college hockey. From there, they may become a professional hockey player. If a player chooses not to play High School Hockey, some associations continue teams through the age of eighteen. These teams are mostly for recreation, and many associations do not have adequate numbers to run these programs.

### **Midway Hockey**

Midway is a family friendly city of 15,000 people located in the Midwestern United States. It is situated in a state where hockey is very popular. Midway is mostly a bedroom community, where generally at least one parent commutes to work in one of the larger surrounding cities. The Midway community has many family-friendly activities throughout the year including a city celebration, fun runs, fireworks, movies and music in the park. The Midway school district is composed of Midway and the two neighboring towns of “Riverside” and “Painesville”. There are six elementary schools in the district, one middle school, one high school, one alternative high school and one transition program. Approximately 5,800 children attend the Midway Public Schools.

Midway also has a hockey association. The Midway Youth Hockey Association currently has 21 teams ranging from Mini-Mites through Bantam. It draws students from Midway, Riverside, and Painesville. The association starts children as young as 5 years old on Mini-Mites teams. Many families whose children play hockey have been participating in the Midway Youth Hockey Association for many years. The youth hockey association is the feeder program for the Midway High School Hockey team.

**Midway high school hockey program.** The Midway High School Hockey program is a school sponsored sport. The school Athletic Director is in charge of the program. In this role, he hires coaches, conducts program oversight, and ensures the program is run according to the state High School league rules. Players in grades 8-12 can try out and participate on the High School team. During the 2010-2011 season, 28 students played on the varsity and junior varsity teams.

The Midway school district financially supports the hockey team. Players pay a \$175.00 participation fee at the beginning of the season, which entitles them to ice time, coaching, transportation, tournaments, and a loaned uniform. The basic equipment such as hockey sticks and pads are the responsibilities of the players themselves. Each player is also required to participate in fundraising throughout the season to cover additional expenses. The Midway High School Hockey program also has an active booster club that helps support the team.

During the 2010-2011 hockey season, two head coaches were hired to run the program. Coach Williams had been coaching the Midway High School Varsity hockey team for 16 years and had a record of 185-184-13. Coach Brown had an extensive background in hockey, including playing professionally and running his own hockey school. Six assistant coaches were hired to assist them, including a specific strength coach and goaltending coach.

This was the first year the Midway High School Hockey program had two head coaches. When questioned, the High School Athletic Director described his feelings about having two head coaches: “I thought it was great. I didn’t really know what to expect and I really didn’t have any other expectation for Coach Brown than to learn the game: to learn High School Hockey and learn what High School is all about. And he accomplished that mission. Stick through the season, watch Coach Williams work, watch all the things that are part of the High School program, and start preparing to take more of a leadership role, and I think Coach Williams is ready to give that up too. So, I thought it was good. It was good for the program” (Coach Martin, personal communication, March, 18, 2011).

High School Hockey practices and games are at “prime ice time.” Practice begins shortly after school, and usually concludes by 6:00PM. Games are once or twice a week, with weeknight games beginning at 7:00PM and Saturday games beginning at 1:00PM or 3:00PM. There are never games or practices on Sundays, according to the state High School league rules.

The schedule the Midway High School Hockey program plays is considered a tough schedule. Over 50% of the schools games during the 2010-2011 season were against teams ranked in the top 20 teams in the state, in their appropriate bracket. Midway was not ranked among the top 20 teams.

The schedule we play is a very tough schedule. That’s another reason my son wanted to play High School Hockey and not Bantams. I think the conference games we have are probably the best in the state. I think, when all is said and done, the kids are glad they played the best in the state. Because when they are down at the state tournament, they have played them. They’ve gone up against

those kids. I think they feel better about it at that time, but I also think it's a balance of wins and losses. I like the schedule, I'm an advocate of playing the best to become better and that's another reason our kid's moved up. He is going to get better playing better kids. (Mary Lee, personal communication, March 24, 2011)

***High school hockey program philosophy.*** High School Hockey is comprised of the elite athletes who have earned their way onto the team. They must be skilled athletes and good students. The mission of the team is "to expose and provide participants with the opportunity to experience and enjoy a rewarding and challenging educational hockey experience." (Midway Team Playbook, p.2) The High School Athletic Director describes his philosophy for the program,

Well, I want to see it two-fold: I want to see the philosophy of this program to teach kids life lesson, to raise kids and understand that the lessons that you're going to learn in this program: hard work, commitment, dedication, perseverance all those things are learned through the vehicle of sport. And, then, the second piece is when you get to the varsity level, it's our gifted and talented program and we're trying to compete at the highest level we can, especially at the varsity level. Really we have two levels and that's all. But as you go down then, into the Bantams and the youth hockey, I would hope that it's participatory and people are enjoying the sport and those types of things. That's the way I describe it to parents too that say, 'It's our coach's job to choose the gifted and talented and make those judgments for the varsity program.' But



regardless, you can raise what I call quality individuals and teach them the life lessons that are part of playing sports (Coach Martin, personal communication, Jan. 14, 2011)

High School athletes constantly have to balance both school and hockey. The Midway Team Playbook clearly states, “Midway Hockey has a proud tradition of dedication to excellence both on and off the ice and in the classroom. We expect all players to be good citizens first, students second, and hockey players third. It is your responsibility to act in a mature and appropriate manner in school and in our community. Any time you are connected with our program, please do your best to represent Midway High School in a positive manner” (Midway Team Playbook, p.3).

Coaches have access to school behavior, attendance, and academic records; are able to communicate with teachers and administrators; and often check-in with their players during the school day to ensure success both academically and as a student athlete. Because coaches develop relationships with the school community, they generally have a good idea about the areas in which their players are struggling and excelling. They are advocates for their athletes to support them in both their academic and athletic performances.

**Midway Bantam hockey program.** The Midway Youth Hockey Association manages the Bantam team. According to the Bylaws, “The purpose of this corporation shall be to promote, sponsor, provide facilities for, and conduct a supervised program of hockey training and competition for hockey players for the purpose of making them better citizens and better sportsmen, and in the furtherance of aiding in their physical and mental development” (Midway Youth Hockey Association Member Handbook, p. 23). The Hockey Association runs all hockey

in Midway from the Mini-Mite (ages 5-6) teams through Jr. Gold (16-19) teams. On average, the association has 21 teams per year. The Midway Youth Hockey Association board of directors is in charge of the program, hiring coaches, financial oversight, and ensuring program outcome. The Bantam team consists of players' ages 13-14 years old. Teams are selected through tryouts.

Try-outs consist of five evenings. I'm on the committee that makes the selections for all three Bantam teams and it is comprised of between three and five evaluators, three would be a minimum. We have a sheet with no names, just the players' numbers and the color of the jersey. I'm trying to keep a little anonymity to the process, and we go through a process of ranking them on certain skills. Putting specific notes in there, you know, anything you think could affect your decision later. Or, anything that you think could spark a memory, oh, that's right, that was kid, so, any little note helps immensely when you're going through that. What we ended up doing was, at first, we knew we're going to lose a couple of kids to High School, we didn't know it was going to be five. (Coach Smith, personal communication, Nov. 23, 2010)

Traditionally, 9<sup>th</sup> graders play at the Bantam level. Because of the circumstances described in the next section, five 9<sup>th</sup> graders moved up to the High School team during the year in which I collected data. This schism created unprecedented reorganization in the Midway hockey community. After the teams were chosen, Coach Smith had 15 players. Coach Smith knew that he was going to lose some players to the High School team, but ended up losing more than expected. In the end, only 13 players were left on the Bantam team so Coach Smith decided to

pull-up one more player from a lower Bantam level so that he would have adequate numbers for the season.

### Differences between Bantam vs. High School Hockey Programs

	Bantam	High School
Program Oversight	Midway Youth Hockey Association Board of Directors	High School Athletic Director
Association	United States Youth Hockey Association	State High School League
Finances	\$1,430.00 plus fundraising	\$175.00 plus fundraising
Transportation	Provided by parents	Provided by school
Tournaments	Extra fee	Included
Practice Time	9:00-10:15 PM during the week Saturday practice time varies Sunday practice time varies	3:00-6:00 PM during the week Saturday 1:00-3:00 PM No Sunday practice

Figure 2

Players pay \$1,430.00 at the Bantam level to participate, not including the cost of tournaments. There also is required fundraising to cover additional expenses. This fee covers ice time and coaching. Players are responsible for their own transportation to and from practices and games and all equipment except for their jersey. There are fundraising opportunities throughout the year that assist parents and players with the costs.

Bantam practices are usually late in the evening. It is common to have practice start at 9:00PM and end around 10:15PM. Games usually are at 7:00PM during the week, and are at various times on the weekend. The Bantam team plays both conference and tournament games on Sundays. Figure 2 displays the difference between Bantam and High School Hockey.

***Bantam hockey program philosophy.*** The Midway Youth Hockey Association has a clear philosophy for all of its teams as stated in its member handbook. It states,

Through MYHA, our goal is to emphasize the educational and recreational values of ice hockey. These guidelines are directed at children participating in MYHA but must be implemented by coaches, officials, parents and administrators to ensure that the USA Hockey philosophy is upheld. The commitment to a MYHA hockey team should take a secondary role to family, church, and school obligations. There must be a mutual respect in each of the following:

- Coach to player
- Player to coach
- Player to player
- Coach to coach
- Parent to coach
- Coach to parent

Players, coaches, and parents must realize that coaching is teaching and that perfection is not possible, but is something that you strive toward. Coaches, players, and parents giving their best effort are the keys to success. (Midway Youth Hockey Association Member Handbook, p.2)

Because MYHA is a part of the bigger USA Hockey Association, their philosophy must be based on the USA Hockey Philosophy of Youth Hockey. As of 2009, a new philosophical model was developed to ensure all players were receiving consistent development and a positive experience in the sport. The USA Hockey Philosophy states,

#### Philosophy of Youth Hockey

As hockey has expanded from the typical hotbeds of Massachusetts, Michigan, and Minnesota to where the game is now played in all 50 states, USA Hockey knew it was essential to put forth a consistent development model that associations nationwide could utilize.

It was in January of 2009 that USA Hockey introduced the American Development Model to positively affect the development landscape of youth hockey in the United States. The ideas of play, love and excel are the foundation that the ADM is built on. Once the kids are on the ice and playing, the game itself can only take them so far. There need to be reasons to love the game. And if all they're doing is playing hockey 365 days a year, there's a good chance the game they're supposed to love becomes more of a chore than a passion. That amount of exposure too early on can put undue stress and pressure on them and give the kids plenty of reasons not to love hockey.

#### ***PLAY***

Playing the game is where kids learn that the game is, in its simplest form, fun. By mixing in age-appropriate training and practice with an introduction to skills and athleticism, kids will have even more fun. And to keep it fun, there should be

a low priority placed on winning and losing and a high priority placed on just introducing the game to a young kid.

### ***LOVE***

Once kids learn to play the game and begin to develop skills and athleticism, hockey begins to take priority among their other activities. Skills become more refined, their physical and mental makeup is stronger and the friendships they developed early on continue to grow. The games become more important, and hockey in general becomes a bigger part of their lives.

### ***EXCEL***

Now that they play and love the game, a higher premium can be placed on excelling at it. Tougher competition and more of a focus on mastering skills play an increased role in their development. Hockey starts to take a larger priority over other activities. But, above all, the game is still fun and the friendships that were forged back in Mites are as strong as ever. The bottom line is that if we can give kids reasons to stick with the game, we can unlock their potential and help them excel at the game they play and love. (2011-13 Official Rules and Casebook of Ice Hockey, p.xv-xvi)

The USA Hockey and MYHA Hockey philosophy must be upheld on every team in the association. From there, each coach is able to develop a personal coaching philosophy. Coach Smith explains, “My coaching philosophy basically is...number one to try and nurture and raise young adults and number two to teach them as much as I can about the game of hockey and try and pass on my passion for the game to them, but I think my priorities lay in developing good human beings.” He does this by encouraging his players to treat foreign rinks as they would

their own. Another emphasis is that the locker room is always left cleaner than when they entered. It even carries over to their bench.

When you get a chance to see us play, take a look at the bench once. The kids all sit during the whole time when on the bench. Nobody is allowed to stand. They have their blade of their stick down and the butt up. The reason for that is if we have a calm orderly bench when these kids come over for a line change front, they aren't tangling with other players, hooking the stick. The kids kind of looked at me like I was crazy, I just started that this year. Now they are all buying into it they see how easy it is to see out on the ice when you're there now, instead of somebody standing in front of you. So, I teach them there is a little something to being orderly. (Coach Smith, personal communication, Nov. 23, 2010)

Coach Smith always is looking for opportunities to relate what players are learning in hockey to life in general; and developing hockey lessons into life lessons.

**Transition: players moving up to varsity from Bantam.** The 2010-2011 season presented a unique situation for both the Midway High School and Midway Bantam hockey teams. The High School program did not have enough players for their teams, so the two coaches invited players from the 9<sup>th</sup> grade to try-out for the High School team. Because this meant players would be playing at the High School level instead of in the youth association, the High School coaches and the Youth Hockey Association had to coordinate tryouts and placement on teams. This was the first time multiple youth association players were ever invited to try out for and move up to the High School program. This anomalous year provided a situation where parental behavior and associations were more apparent.

Unlike other years, parents and players had to choose between the height of Bantam hockey or the opportunity to move to High School Hockey early. This meant leaving their friends at the Bantam level, dismissing the dream of being Bantam state champions, and taking on new roles and responsibilities as they would enter into the High School Hockey program. Overall, no one would be absolutely happy with this decision.

#### 2010 - 2011 Hockey Season Progression

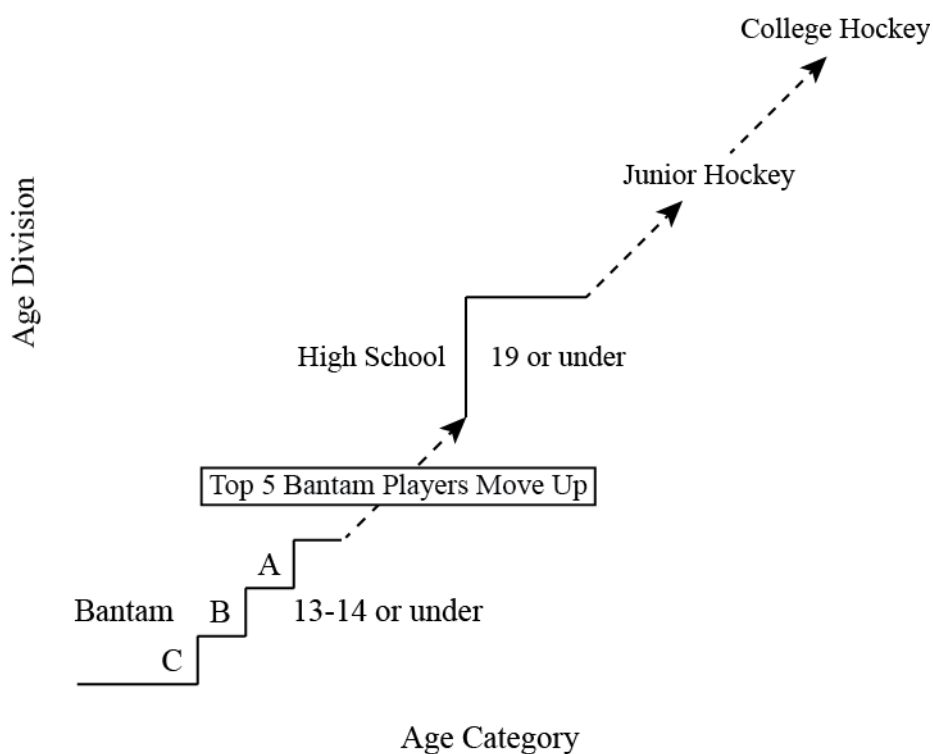


Figure 3

There were positives and negatives that needed to be weighed for each family, and ultimately no one was delighted about being placed in the situation. Figure 3 displays how the 2010-2011 seasons' pattern of age-grouped sub-divisions changed in an unusual way for Midway.

Coach Williams called a 9<sup>th</sup> grade hockey parent meeting on October 25, 2010, to discuss the situation. Bantam tryouts were already underway, and parents were invited to this meeting at



the end of one night's tryout. During the meeting, Coach Williams explained the situation the High School was in. He outlined how the selection process would work, provided an overview of the schedule, equipment, fees, and fundraising, and discussed other pertinent information to help parents make a decision.

We are asking select 9<sup>th</sup> grades to move up after tryouts. Currently we have 24 kids right now in the High School program and we need 30-34 players. We wanted a meeting with everyone, not just a few here and there, to answer all questions and send a consistent message. We are looking to invite 7-10 players to the High School program. We have been upfront with the Midway Youth Hockey Association in our needs and we are working with them. What we have asked, and what we want to do, are identify 7-10 players prior to having the Bantam teams announced (Coach Williams, personal communication, Oct. 25, 2010).

Bantam parents had many questions and wanted to ensure the best for all players. One parent stated, "This is a terrible position we are putting our kids in. It is very unfair because they are screwing the kids they are leaving behind." Another parent asked, "Wouldn't it be better for the kids to play together? 7-10 kids would be the studs of the Bantam team." Another parent stated, "My only concern is if 7-10 kids go, it's going to be tough competition wise for them." And another parent, "Coach Williams, you know I'm huge about skill development but I've seen this program. I've seen teams that aren't really developed. How do you guarantee that all kids are going to get skill developmental work and playing time?" Coach Williams took the time to answer all the parents' questions, asked them to discuss it with their children, and let him know if anyone did not want their child moving up to the High School program.

Parents and coaches were put into a situation where there were multiple differing opinions. The Bantam coach and High School coaches each had their own perspective of the situation, as did the parents who chose to move their children up, compared to the parents who chose to keep their child at the Bantam level. Parents each had their own reasons for their choice, but ultimately, their individual decisions caused turmoil in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade parent dynamic. Although both Bantam and High School groups were still part of the hockey cult, a schism had occurred.

*Coaches perspective.* All coaches wanted the best for both the High School and Bantam programs. They understood that this was a unique situation which was not ideal for any of the players, coaches, or parents. They all would have to work together to make the best of the situation. Each coach had his own team on which to focus, and each had his own perspective of the situation. They knew that once the decisions were made, they must move forward and make the best of the season.

A varsity coach, Coach Williams, reflected on the process of bringing Bantam players up to the High School program.

Well, I thought it went very well. I was upfront and honest as I had to be and needed to be, I think. I think I was straight-up with the parents. I ultimately let the kids make the decisions. I know, I think in retrospect, we went with a real short roster because of it and, there were two or three other kids that we would have liked to come up, but they chose to stay down. And you know, it was interesting because a few of the kids or their parents rallied the kids to stay down. And, I just didn't get into it. I wasn't going to get into it. I had the meeting, some of the parents said well, gees, you know, you should have just met with the

seven of us to proclaim seven that they thought should have come up. I refused to do that because it's a whole program and I didn't think it was fair. There was a couple kids I thought were varsity-type players and I did talk to individually. I talked to any of the kids individually that kind of came up and talked to me, so I made a point of calling them and talking to them about the whole thing. You know, a number of kids decided to stay down that I did talk to that had some interest. And, you know, it was their choice, but I wasn't going to get into that game with the parents. We're the High School program; we have an opportunity for the ninth-graders. I divided them all as you know, and some chose to come and some didn't, but I didn't get into, the clandestine meetings or any of that. They did though. (Coach Williams, personal communication, March 16, 2010)

Obviously, there was some tension throughout the process. Parents and players had to make the correct decision for their family. Reflecting back at the end of the season, Coach Williams felt the choice to move up Bantam players was the correct decision. In the end, the Bantam program still had three teams and went to the regional tournament. The JV team won more games than they ever had in the past. As for the players, Coach Williams described, "The kids that moved up all played integral roles. One, two, three, four, five of them actually got to dress for some varsity play. So, for those kids, it was a great opportunity. I think they excelled in their development, to be honest" (personal communication, March 22, 2010).

The other varsity coach, Coach Brown, discussed how the High School program was unique this year, because of being short on numbers. One of the ways the coaches handled this was to practice JV and Varsity together. Coach Brown described how this affected the players that moved up, "I think they learned a heck of a lot, and not only did they learn a lot, but they'll

be more comfortable when they get called on for next year. They're already a step ahead of the next group of boys" (Coach Brown, personal communication, March 30, 2011). Playing at the High School level at a young age will give the boys that moved up an advantage in the future. Coach Brown explains, "They understand the intensity of the practice, every day. And they understand what's expected and there is a transition phase for the kids, when they first become a part of the program, and I think it's pretty valuable" (personal communication, March 30, 2011).

The Bantam coach, Coach Smith, was aware that there was some serious disappointment with his team early in the season.

I'm sure this group of kid's talks all the time in school and spring league hockey, fall league hockey, and I'm sure they envision them as a super team in their eyes. Oh my gosh, you know the last time we had these kids together we were "Pee-Wee A's" and we walked through and easily won. And I'm sure they were looking down the same road and as that road started to turn, some of the kids were a little depressed. Actually, I think it turned out to work out very well. The fact that I think these kids quit looking for somebody else to do all the work and suddenly everybody knew it was either we're going to do this or it's not going to get done. So, I think it turned out pretty well, but at first, yeah, there was a lot of moping around and everybody was standing around, actually. I kind of warned them what was going to happen; what was the year going to bring now, because it had changed so dramatically from what they envisioned. (Coach Smith, personal communication, March 22, 2011)

The Bantam team looked different than everyone had expected at the end of the 2009-2010 season. Being on the Bantam A team is the culmination of the youth level, with high expectations to perform well. Having the best players leave and move to the High School level affected the youth program as a whole. Those who stayed with the Bantam level considered leaving to be sacrilegious, a breaking of tradition and a failure to complete a commitment to the Midwest Youth Hockey program. Luckily, Coach Smith only heard little comments here and there from his players about the situation. He felt it was all minor and focused his team on moving forward and having the best season possible.

However, the Athletic Director, Coach Martin, had a completely different perspective of the situation. Working with all sports and both male and female students, Martin has a firm grasp on the developmental level of the students. He described, “They’re eighth-graders or ninth-graders. I think that at that age, they kind of need to be directed. And when there’s multiple people giving direction it always becomes confusing for a young kid like that to try to sort out all of what that entails” (personal communication, March 18, 2011). He was aware that there was animosity from parents about players moving up. Personally, he admits being biased towards players moving onto the High School team. But he also stated that, “It doesn’t hurt to stay young and play in the youth programs for as long as you can” (personal communication, March 18, 2011). Interestingly enough, none of the parents sought him out for guidance while trying to make the decision of whether or not to move their child up to the High School team.

Martin facilitated the varsity coaches’ meeting with students to discuss moving up to the High School level. He described how he saw the meetings as an opportunity to allow the coaches to personally invite players to join them on the team.

You know, it was more of an invite to say, in my opinion, this is the pinnacle of hockey, to play High School Hockey. And, the coach has the right to express that opinion to a kid. You know, a parent might disagree with me and might say I don't want you to talk to my kid without me present because they're going to play Bantams and I don't want you talking and influencing them. And then I say, then pick up the phone and make sure that your communication is a two-way street. Pick up the phone, call me and say, I have some concerns. They knew this was going on. Every parent knew this was going on. All you'd have to do is say call me and say, I don't want this talked about. We've already made our decision and then I would follow through on that. On the same token, if that's not done, I'm going to support my coaches. And, if you don't get that as a parent, and you think that that's weird, then we're going to have to agree to disagree. (Coach Martin, personal communication, March 18, 2011)

Although no parents spoke to Coach Martin before or after the players meeting with the coach, he was aware that some parents were unhappy that the meetings took place. After the decisions were made by the players and parents, Coach Martin states that he moved on. Some of the players chose to move up and some chose to stay at the Bantam level. It was their choice, and they made their decision.

***High School parent perspective.*** The parents who chose to move their child from the Bantam level to the High School level were content with their decisions. In general, they moved on after the decision was made and did not look back. One parent who moved their child up explains, "I have absolutely no regrets. I am one hundred percent we made the right decision for our kid. He made the right decision. He has grown emotionally, he has grown socially, and he

has grown as a hockey player. I think it's good. It was right, it was the right decision" (Ben Campbell, March 7, 2011).

In general, parents who moved their child up to the High School level did not talk about any opposition to the move. They made their decision and moved on. One parent did talk about the other parents and players at the Bantam level at the end of the season and her general impression was they had paved the path for the other parents. The parents that moved their kids were supportive of the coaches, players, and the High School program. They are excited for the other Bantam players to join the team next year.

***Bantam parent perspective.*** Bantam parents discussed the transition much more than parents who chose to move their players to the High School program. Each parent had a different perspective of the situation. In general, they were upset that the High School coach had placed the parents and players in this position. There was animosity against the coach, the parents who allowed their players to move up, and the youth association for allowing this to happen to their team. Parents and players had worked hard to excel at the Bantam level, and in one fell swoop Coach Williams was taking that away from them. The team would not be as strong without all of the members. Parents also felt that the players who had left were not part of the core group. The parents and players had not developed the close knit relationships with the other members of the team and therefore did not have the same commitment to the Bantam team as the other families.

The second year parents at the Bantam level had developed a relationship with each other that was very close. Coaches and other players had sometimes referred to them as "The Cult" because of the intensity of their relationships. This group of parents and all of their children got

along with each other. Since their children were in Mini-Mites, this set of parents had always been grouped together. Their children were considered to be good athletes who had talent. The parents relied on each other for support and participated in group activities and events. They had carved out a niche for their team where everyone felt comfortable with each other and they knew what was expected of them. When some parents chose to move their child to the High School level, this group dynamic was shaken. Some parents were upset about the process.

Even as the season progressed, parents carried animosity towards the High School coaches asking Bantam players to move up. Many parents never got over the fact that their team dynamics had changed and that they looked different than they had envisioned. Although each parent and child made their own decision, most Bantam parents blamed the High School coaches for tearing apart their ideal team.

**Reflections on the season.** Coaches and parents felt they had a successful season at both the High School and Bantam levels. Parents were supportive of the coaches for whom their children played and felt their children had a positive experience. Although it was a challenging year for everyone, overall the reflections of the season were positive.

***High School program.*** Midway High School ended up with a Varsity record of 7 wins, 17 losses, and one tie game. Although it was a transitional season with many young players, parents and coaches felt it was a success. Coach Brown states, “I think it went exceptionally well; I do. I think they definitely got better. They got to understand the speed that we’re asking for” (personal communication, March 30, 2011). The High School program struggled against many teams that they should have beat. The end of the season record did not indicate how they played. The team played a difficult season and had nine one-goal games that came down to the



end. The players worked hard, and the coaches felt that the overall season was developmentally positive for everyone.

One High School parent made a point of talking about the coaching, “I think the kids had very consistent coaching. I am very impressed with the quality of the coaching. The JV kids, in my mind, improved leaps and bounds from beginning to the end of the season. They practiced against a varsity team all year and their practices were as hard as or harder than games” (Jack Johnson, personal communication, March 1, 2011). Parent’s stressed how they saw their children improve over the season. Although it was a challenging season with disappointment about the win/loss ratio, parents reflected on their children’s growth and felt good about the season overall.

***Bantam program.*** The Bantam program ended with a record of 24 wins, 15 losses, and 5 ties. The parents were pleased with the season, but felt it could have been better if they had not lost players to the High School program. Overall there was a sense of disappointment based on what the season could have looked like. Losing the top five players to the High School team placed the remaining team at a disadvantage. Coach Smith felt the team rallied and performed well. Unfortunately, it did not meet many of the parent’s dreams and expectations.

The boys who played at the Bantam level stepped up and ended with a winning season. In the end, they won two tournaments and finished stronger than they had in recent past seasons in the Bantam A state tournament. Coach Smith states, “Talent-wise we should have never been there, but the kids really came together and played well this year. That’s a credit to them” (personal communication, March 22, 2011).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Parents Staging Hockey as Character Development

It's a Thursday night in February. Hockey has been in season for the past three months and is starting to come to an end. Tonight is a "big game" for the Midway High School hockey team, as they are playing a neighboring town. Varsity parents start arriving to the arena around 6:45PM. As they enter the arena, they show their season passes and make their way into the arena where a Junior Varsity game is currently underway. They congregate as a group around the glass and engage in small talk with the other parents. "How's the game?" "Who's looking good tonight?" "How's Johnny feeling? Is his ankle better?"

As the JV game comes to an end, varsity parents begin to move over to the other arena, where varsity players are just taking the ice. This arena is full. Students, parents, and families are filling the stands in anticipation of the game. There is a dull roar in the arena with all the conversations and excitement. As the parents enter, they stand by the glass and cheer as the players enter the ice to warm up. They identify their child and talk with the other parents around them. They then move to the concession stand where they buy food and drinks before they find their seats in the stands. There is a standard behavioral pattern which the parents follow as a ritual.

As they move to their seats, there are many people they know in the arena. They stop to talk to the school's Athletic Director, parents of prior hockey players, family friends, etc. They know many of the people in the arena and take the time to talk with others as they make their way to their designated seats which are located on the right hand side of the stands. Once in the seats they find many other Midway hockey parents and settle into their seats. Although the parents do not all sit together, many sit within close proximity, usually in the last 3-4 rows

behind the Midway student section. Joining them are their spouses, other children, extended family members, and friends.

The parents engage in conversations with one another about the game. They are excited for the game to start and to see their children play. The conversations move quickly away from hockey and onto other topics until the game starts. Once the game starts, there is little conversation between parents in the stands. They become very focused on the game itself.

At the end of the game, the parents wait around for a while for everyone else to clear out of the arena. Unfortunately, Midway has lost the game. The parents are conspicuously very quiet. The few conversations that are taking place are not about hockey. Once all the players have cleared the ice and the stands empty, the parents begin to make their way to the exit and head home. The parents do not wait in the exit to talk, as each will speak with his or her child once they get home, in a private setting.

Parents are a vital part of any modern sports program. The time, money, and emotional support they provide to their children's teams are priceless. The role parents currently play in youth sports has changed over the years, and continues to change. As parents spend more time at practices and games, providing transportation, fundraising, and attending parents meeting for their child's sport, their personal identity begins to change. In general, interactionists theorize that it is through an interpretive process that individuals construct an image of "self." This is the way people define or see who they are. "In constructing or defining self, people attempt to see themselves as others see them by interpreting gestures and actions directed toward them and by placing themselves in the role of the other people" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p.29). By dedicating so much of themselves to their child's sport, their own self images are altered.

Parents are expected to act in a specified way while they are present at their children's sporting event, although these same expectations may not exist away from the sport. Throughout the season, parents take on many dramaturgical roles to ensure that their child succeeds. They display in the front stage the ideals of good parenting. They do this through actions that other members of the hockey community can observe. They then go on to ensure that their child learns life skills necessary for his future. They do this by co-directing the lessons of teamwork, sportsmanship, discipline, structure, and responsibility with the coach. By working together, the child is directed to learn these life skills. The parents work to make sure their child is successful. They see practice as the rehearsal and the games as the performance. At the performance, parents can truly appreciate their hard work throughout the season. Unfortunately, when things do not go as the parents have scripted, they lose their dramaturgical focus. This is seen in their complaints and fears. Each of the ways parents script their child's sports participation is examined with a dramaturgical focus in this chapter.

### **Practices as Rehearsals, Games as Performances**

In sports today, parents are spending more time, money, and interest on their child's sports participation. As an integral part of their child's sports, parents receive their own rewards. Although these rewards are mostly intrinsic, parents place a great deal of value on what they personally are gaining from the experience. Parents are able to experience how their parenting techniques are working. Both the coach and the parents put hard work in their child's future in practices and want to see their success in the performance at the games. Actions of "good" parenting become visible not only to parents, but also to other member of the community. Through their interaction with their child, intrinsic rewards are developed for the parents. Symbolic Interaction takes place as parents find evidence that their parenting is reflected in their

child's activity. The way their child plays his part on the hockey stage becomes a sign of success for the parents. Parents are able to direct the action of their hockey player and feel rewards through their child's success. The following are the rewards the parents describe and assign meaning.

**Watching their child's success/loss.** Parents experience their child's successes and losses right along with them. They invest their own emotions into the child's sport and want their child to do well. They want to provide guidance, emotional support, and protection for their child. By enrolling their child in hockey, parents direct the lessons their child learns. Most of the parent's direct guidance takes place in the backstage. The parents become emotionally involved in the team and are able to enjoy their child's success and losses along with their child. Mark Anderson exemplifies how parents become emotionally involved in the sport right along with their child.

The things he's experiencing, the thrill of victory and agony and defeat, especially the thrill of victory. You make that game-winning goal. You never get to experience that once you're grown up in the real world. You'll never experience that thing again, and so, I want him to do the best he can right now. 'Cause [sic] I've told him, when you're 25 or 30, don't say I wish I would have done this. Or, I wish I would have done that, 'cause [sic] we all do it, I told him. I've done it, your mom's done it, and I'm just telling you, you're gonna [sic] do it too. So give it everything you've got right now. And so, I don't know if you'd call that...living out my fantasy through him, 'cause [sic] if that was the case, he'd be playing basketball. But, you just want to see them do good and learn from it. So, I think that's what motivates me is the fact that you'll never get the opportunity to

get some of these situations or feelings ever again. They'll be different and they'll be good and bad. (personal communication, Jan. 13, 2011)

Hockey provides an opportunity for parents to direct the lessons their child learns. They use hockey as a rehearsal for their adult life. The joy of being able to share the experience with their child is something to which parents look forward. This enjoyment is experienced at the games on the front stage with the other parents of the team. Parents cherish this opportunity because it allows them to connect with their child and gives them a stage to practice the life lessons.

**Watching their child grow.** Another reward that parents receive through sports participation is being able to watch their child grow. Because parents attend more practices, games, clinics, and hockey events in general, they feel they are aware of what skills their child has mastered. Parents enjoy seeing this growth and are proud of their child's accomplishments as it also reflects back on their parenting skills. Maria Jones explains, "It's fun to see them do well, have fun, have a great game, master something; like he's got that slap shot down now or, achieving different levels now that he may have had an issue with a month ago. But, he has busted his butt and worked hard and now he's stronger, better, and is accomplishing more, growing as a person" (personal communication, March 19, 2011). Scripting the lessons of hard work, perseverance, and accomplishment are valuable to parents. They use hockey as a way to direct the lessons their child learns and feel rewarded when their child is successful at mastering these skills. When their child is learning new skills and growing as a person, parents are happy as they feel that they have done a good job parenting. However, when parents feel that their child is not growing and improving in the sport, they feel that they were unsuccessful at directing their child's developmental growth both on and off the ice. This leads to interactions that are negative towards their child, coach, and the sport (hockey) in general.

Parents personalize the growth their child makes. Whether it is a skill the child has mastered, the way they process their own success/failures, or how they navigate through a difficult time on the team, parents want to know that their directing of life lessons is successful. Each of these lessons is a sign of “good” parenting, according to hockey parents. They want to see that their child is growing and assign meaning to their success as parents at directing these life lessons.

I think what makes me feel good is when he’s able to acknowledge the growth that he has had; because things that make me happy don’t necessarily make him happy. And, I am not always just feeling rewarded when he is just happy. I want him to feel those struggles, and to feel that frustration and then battle through it and not give up. The other things that make me feel good; it is when you’re able to talk to him about it, and, when it’s over and done with and at emotional peace, walk through what’s happened. (Mary Lee, personal communication, March 24, 2011)

By being able to experience and discuss the growth with their child, parents become even more involved in the sport. They are able to choreograph the life lessons they want their child to learn from hockey. The lessons players learn take place in the front stage, but the discussions between the parent and child are often in the backstage. The meaning that the parent assigns to each situation may be different than that which the child assigns to it initially. Parents are able to stage the situation so that their child can learn life lessons. Because parents are not the ones playing the game, they need to be cautious about how they behave, based on the meaning they assign to each situation. It is imperative that parents take the time to see the situation from their child’s view and work towards developing the same meaning as their child’s for the growth that

has occurred. This will allow the parent to utilize their child's hockey experiences to help them learn the lessons the parents want them to take from their hockey participation.

**Bonding with their child.** Sports create an experience that allows parents to bond with their child. Because the experience is something they can share, parents take the opportunity to utilize the experience to strengthen their personal relationships. Much of this bonding occurs in the front stage through attending the games and supporting their child, but also in the backstage discussing their child's accomplishments with them. Emily Clark explains how she is able to bond with her child over hockey.

Personally, I enjoy watching. But, most importantly, he needs to know that his efforts are noticed and validated. And you know, I tell him... we kind of talk through stuff. I've learned that I don't ask him. I don't say, well, you had a good game. I don't play that. Now, I say, 'how do you think your game was?' And let him kind of make his own assessment, rather than telling him what he had or my opinion. (personal communication, March 30, 2011)

Being able to discuss the game with their child is an experience all parents in this study describe as a positive result of their child's participation in sports as it allows them to teach many lifelong skills to their child. The unchoreographed freeness of the backstage allows for parents to openly speak with their child without the conventions of the front stage. Emily Clark is a parent who does not like to assign her own meaning to her son's game, but rather, she prefers he tell her how he interpreted his game. Matthew White approaches his discussions with his son with the intent to compare his child's feelings compared to his game performance. He states,



I try to get how he felt, so that I can compare it to how his game was, I kind of base that on how he is feeling compared to how he was playing. I like to know the difference, and I can tell on starting a conversation on how he felt his performance was with his feedback. If he thought he did well, he is tending to react more; and if he doesn't feel quite like he gave enough, it's real short, quick. (personal communication, March 24, 2011)

By reading his son's reaction to his questions, he places meaning on the way his son performed. These backstage conversations allow him to more clearly understand his son. Each of these parents approaches the conversations differently, yet both of them enjoy the discussions, because this allows the parent and child to develop a common meaning. This common meaning ultimately leads to bonding with one another and allows the parents an opportunity to direct their child in taking the lessons learned in hockey and applying them to lifelong skills.

Another unique situation which sports provide for many families is that many parents actually participated in the same sport as children. Parents enjoy sharing their own experiences as a way of helping their child. Because parents have assigned their own meaning to their experiences as players, sometimes this can cause conflict - specifically if their child is not developing the same meaning towards the sport. However, when parents and child come to the same understanding, the bonding that occurs is cherished.

I like when they come home and you see that sense of accomplishment. They understand that what dad was talking about or when they can work through something; if there's controversy or something. If they get into trouble, they have to work their way out of it. I mean, I am going to support them. But, as I told them, I will give you one chance to tell me the truth. If it's not the truth, then I

can't support you. So, you get one chance, tell the truth upfront; and if you were wrong, face the consequences. But, their sense of accomplishment, they feel good about it whether they: scored a couple goals, couple baskets, block a guy, tackle a guy. "Hey dad did you see me run that guy over?" And, I always say "I did", and I like to end it with "There's maybe a bigger guy out there next time, so get lower." "You did great, but don't need to brag, because there is a bigger guy out there and someone is going to stir up your lunch someday." (Jack Johnson, personal communication, March 1, 2011)

Parents who have participated in hockey come into the sport with a clearer vision of how they would like to direct the lessons their child learns. This can be a challenge because each player has a different experience in the sport. Although hockey provides an opportunity for parents to share their knowledge with their child and fulfill the American idea of "good" parenting by providing protection and supervision, guidance, emotional investment, intellectual stimulation, and constant monitoring, the parent needs to remember that they can only direct so much of the script. Parents must capitalize on their child's experiences and direct their child's learning based on these moments. Through hockey, parents are able to develop a deeper bond with their child. This bond is cherished by many parents.

### **Being the "Good" Parent**

Parents play an important part in insuring their child's future success. They are responsible for teaching their child the many life lessons that are needed to be successful in the future. American parents are under tremendous pressure to ensure that they are providing their child opportunities to learn these life skills at a young age. "Good parents," according to Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie (2008), provide constant protection and supervision, guidance,

emotional investment, intellectual stimulation, and continual monitoring for their child. Parents use sports as a way of directing learning experiences for their children outside of school.

Through hockey, parents script the life lessons they want their child to learn to be successful adults. By enrolling their child in hockey, parents feel they are providing a framework through which they are able to work with their child and have their child practice and perform the lessons needed to be successful in life. Parents do this through their support, teaching appropriate behavior, giving their child space to learn on his/her their own, protecting their child, and controlling their own behavior. Ensuring that their child learns each of these lessons requires parents to play the role of a “good” American parent. Many of the roles are on the front stage where other parents can see their interactions. However, some take place in the backstage and sometimes contradict the front stage role which other people can see. In this section, I will look at how parents are able to direct the life lessons they want their child to learn through sports, the way parents use sports to fulfill the “good parenting” criteria, and how parents’ behavior varies from the front stage to the backstage.

**Provide support.** First and foremost, parents must provide strong support for their child. Parents in this study identified physically being present and cheering for their child as the best ways to accomplish this support.

The biggest thing is that you have to remember that you’re there for your child; you’re there to support the kid, cheer for them. You’re kind of the arm chair for the athlete at this point; always try to give them a couple pointers but we don’t relive the game after the fact. When the game is over, it’s over, ‘maybe if you kept your stick on the ice, you make yourself bigger on the ice,’ just little helpful hints, but it’s their game. I have told the sophomore many times “I am not

playing anymore, I've played, I've done my deals and now if you want to go shoot pucks, if you want me to slide you pucks out on the rink I will do that, but it's your game and you have to deal with the coaches. I don't deal with the coaches. At this point, good luck. (Jack Johnson, personal communication, Dec. 23, 2010)

Supporting a child in sports goes beyond just showing up for the game and cheering for the team; both activities that take place in the front stage. It requires talking with your child, helping them learn from their mistakes, and ensuring they know you care about them and their sports' performance. Investing emotionally in your child is an important part of being a "good" American parent. These supportive conversations occur in the car rides home and around the kitchen table where parents can be open and honest with their child, where both parties do not have to worry about the audience. In this setting, parents can truly direct the life lessons their children learn from their participation in hockey. In the backstage, parents are not under the pressures to conform to the generalized other's expectations. Privately (i.e. backstage), parents can truly open up to their child and do not have to worry about their front stage role. Unfortunately, sometimes these conversations are not actually supportive for the child. Parents may push their own agenda, belittle their child, and/or "coach" their child's performance. Because this behavior is not seen in the front stage, it goes unnoticed by others, and the parent does not feel compelled to act differently.

Sports parents must also support their child financially.

I think it's important for kids to know that their parents are going to be supportive of them. You have to sacrifice; and financially you sacrifice, time wise a sacrifice, all those kinds of things. But, I think it validates the hard work to

know that you know your parents are going to be there, somebody's going to be there. (Emily Clark, personal communication, March 30, 2011)

Without the financial support from their parents, the players would not be able to participate in hockey.

Support from parents is also shown financially or in leadership roles by contributing to the booster club, organizing food for the players, participating in fundraisers, running the clock, supervising the penalty box, and wearing Midway clothing. Through each role, parents outwardly show their support for both the team and their child. The visible support of time, money, and the hockey jobs all take place on the front stage and develop the image which the parents want to be visible to others. Although parents may not have any prior experience in the roles they often take on, they volunteer because they want to support their child and feel this is what they need to do to be “good” parents. There also is an expectation from other parents that parents provide this support, not only for their child, but also the team. This is part of the generalized other's expectation for parents. The ways parents show support is defined by the specific group of parents, coaches, and players interacting with one another, and is redefined as children move through the different levels of play, thus shifting group dynamics. Supporting their child is important to every parent and an important part of being a “good” American parent and ensuring that their child knows they are emotionally invested. The way parents show their support differs for every team and group of parents. Yet, it is evident that most parents genuinely want to be involved and do whatever is needed for their child.

**Teach appropriate behavior.** Sports tend to bring out passion in individuals, and parents are no exception. Parents especially are prone to wanting the best for their child and wanting to see that their child has the best opportunity to be successful on the playing field.

Parents agree that the way that they behave affects their child's behavior. Because of this, parental behavior is altered so that the role they play on the front stage is acceptable to everyone in attendance. They want to be good examples for their children and teach them to behave in an appropriate manner.

I feel we should respect everybody equally. I mean we are spectators of the game and our boundaries are to show that we're just as good participants as the players. We show good sportsmanship, we lead by example for our kids, if we show poor sportsmanship that just trickles down to our kids and that's unacceptable in my book. (Matthew White, personal communication, Jan. 3, 2010)

On the front stage, parents feel the need to be positive role models, "good sports." By taking on this role and demonstrating appropriate behavior, parents expect that their child will learn how to act appropriately.

Showing respect is one way to show sportsmanship. Jessica Wilson states the way which she feels she can show good sportsmanship is

with respect, encouraging of the team, encouraging and never ever 'Boo,' or whatever, the other team. I think you should always be positive and respectful.

Good sportsmanship, basic sportsmanship rules apply as a parent as they do for a kid. (personal communication, January 3, 2010)

Showing respect for everyone, including players, coaches, other parents, and opponents, is important for all parents in this study. In general, when it comes to members of their own team, parents do not struggle with this role. However, parents can struggle in this role when it comes

to opponents. Often when parents do not show respect, they are acting out to protect their child, even if it is unwarranted. The parent chooses which front stage role to play at that moment:

“good sport” or “protective parent.”

**Give space to your child.** At the Bantam and High School level, parents need to start giving their child and the coach space. Parents naturally want to step in and help their child, but when it comes to sports, children and coaches need the time and space to solve conflicts on their own. This is difficult for parents, because their role changes as their child grows. At the younger developmental levels, parents played a role where stepping in and solving conflicts was expected. Parents at the younger levels were able to direct their child’s interactions when it came to hockey. Now, as their child ages, their front stage role has changed. It is now important for parents to allow their child to learn to resolve conflicts on his own. In the front stage, parents must stand back and allow their child to take the lead. They cannot direct as much of their child’s interactions. However, in the backstage, the parent must continue to guide and counsel their child. While backstage, the parent is able to still direct the lessons their child learns through hockey. The parental role changes and this can be difficult for many parents.

Now at the High School level, I try to stay out of it as much as I can. I mean its High School Hockey. They do their deals, the coaches have rules, the coach gives a schedule; it’s very good. He lays it out there for them, but sometimes you can’t micromanage the kids either. You tell them when practice is and when curfew is and let them go, then it’s kind of train the parent also to make sure that Johnny is in at 11:30, was the car in the garage? Yep. Okay. He’s home, make sure he is at home. From the parents’ side of it, it’s make sure the kid is fed, healthy, gets rest, gets his homework done, and presents a student/athlete to the coach. I try to stay

as much out of it as I can. It's his game, his deal, (Jack Johnson, personal communication, Dec. 23, 2010)

There is a transitional phase, when parents become less involved in decisions on and off the ice, to becoming more of a spectator and providing guidance to their child. Part of being a “good” American parent is teaching one's child how to navigate the world on his/her own. Ultimately, parents want to step back so that their child learns this life lesson. By giving their child an opportunity to practice the skills they have learned, they are fulfilling their responsibility as parents. At the Bantam and High School levels, parents describe that it is their children's game and the children are the ones that have to make and live with their decisions. Parents have moved away from being the director on the front stage to directing the backstage interactions. At the Bantam and High School levels, the children are the ones that have to resolve conflicts with their coaches and other players. Because the parenting role evolves and changes, some parents struggle with giving the coach and player space to solve problems on their own, without having mom or dad step in to mediate.

**Control your behavior: others are watching.** Parents have negotiated and defined their role as “parent.” One of the main places where parents struggle is controlling their behavior in the stands, having to constantly play a positive front stage role, and sometimes acting otherwise. Parents observe other parents' behavior, judge them, and see their own behavior judged. Although losing their temper is in direct conflict with many of their parenting roles, many often struggle in this area. They are aware, through the generalized other, of the expectations of the group, but at times it is difficult for parents to behave in this manner. However, even though parents believe that they need to behave, there are mixed messages about how appropriate behavior looks. When asked about what it means to be a hockey parent, George Thomas states,



“I don’t know, according to the news, it means to be a nut case and yell” (personal communication, Feb. 23, 2011). The perception through media is that sports parents are quick to lose their temper. Maria Jones explains how she feels parents should behave.

Better than they do, way better than they do. I don’t know if they are trying to live vicariously through their child, or they still wish they were playing, or what they expect out of their child. Sometimes I am embarrassed. I have talked to a couple of the kids and my son, “did you hear your dad, did you hear your mom?” Sometimes they learn to blow it off; it doesn’t seem to affect the kids. It affects me. I am embarrassed in my own arena on how some of the parents behave. Let the coaches’ coach and let the refs’ ref. Yes, there are bad calls. I mean I am one to stand up at some of the calls, but everyone makes mistakes. Refs can’t catch everything. We have had parents booted out of games, escorted out of the arena. Really, I mean that is out of line. This is for the children to have fun. Did you miss the video when they were mini Mites telling mommy and daddy how to behave? They do that to us, you sit in a room and watch. Years ago they had these parent meetings, and they would show you how to put the equipment on and then they would say how the parents should behave in the stands. You should really know how to do both, but we had to watch that for years. It’s not sinking in. I am horrified that, not only in hockey, but when you see on the news; football dad goes bonkers and tackles another dad, or on the ice, it’s in all sports. Parents are nuts. (personal communication, Jan. 16, 2011)

There is no question that parents struggle with their behavior. Mary Lee explains, “You can guarantee that parents are irrational with their own kids, they completely are” (personal

communication, Jan. 10, 2011). Throughout my research, I asked every parent if they have ever lost control of their behavior. Every single parent stated that they had not. But, they continued on to describe other parents losing control or times when their actions were justified. When parents lose control of their behavior, they are breaking away from their front stage role and going off-script. When parents go off-script, they step outside their director role and do not teach their child the life skills they intended. Although parents can identify the break in performance of others, they struggle to identify it in themselves.

Hockey has made a concerted effort to curtail inappropriate behavior from parents, through discussions at parent meetings, videos, and even classes to address this behavior. The goal is to teach parents about appropriate behavior and change some of the inappropriate behavior in the stands. Hockey as an organization has tried to reframe the expectations of the generalized other. Emily Clark reflects on how fan behavior has changed over the years her son has been participating.

Well, I think it's probably changed a little. When my son first started, he's probably been in hockey eight-nine years; there were still hockey parents that were out of control, you know, rude and obnoxious. I think it's changed. I think the pep program and some of those things have helped. There's been a concerted effort to see a change in behavior. To have the fans of hockey be kind of quick to shut that earlier kind of behavior down. Hockey parents are demanding, they don't look for their team, they look out for the kids and I think that has changed over the years. (personal communication, March 30, 2011)

The concerted effort to positively affect parental behavior is a step in the right direction. The USA Hockey Association has made a concerted effort to educate parents about appropriate

behavior. The interactions that take place in the stands are front stage behavior. Parents understand that they may be witnessing inappropriate behavior, yet many are conflicted as to whether they should step in or leave the parent alone. Until parents redefine their front stage role and demand positive behavior of one another, this behavior will continue. According to Herbert Blumer's theory of symbolic interaction, until parents redefine their meaning of being a "good" American parent and sports parent, we will continue to see the same behavior.

Fortunately, parents are already starting to modify this meaning through their interactions with other parents and the situations they encounter. Jack Johnson explains how his wife shapes his behavior.

I played, I coached and now, as a parent, my wife told me, "You sit on your hands", basically, is what she told me. I mean clap, but "close your mouth and sit there next to me"—next to her—and we watch the game. I said, "Fine", and I did, for the most part. For the most part, you agree to be happy with the outcome as far as the season, and again, I'm not, I'm not nuts. I mean you know, you can see little games, you can see the parents that are "Wow", that are—all I have to say is "Wow." (personal communication, March 1, 2011)

By observing other people and interacting with his wife, Mr. Johnson openly admits that his behavior has changed. The generalized other has shaped his behavior. There is pressure from family and other team parents for a team's fans to maintain an appropriate role front stage. There is hope for sports parents to redefine what behavior is acceptable and how they pass on this behavior to their children. Ultimately, parents want their children to learn appropriate behavior. Unfortunately, because there is not a clear reasoning as to why parents misbehave, there is not a clear way to alter parent's behavior.

**Know when to step in and when to back off.** Although players and coaches need space to appropriately perform their jobs, parents also feel that one of their roles is to know when to step in and when to back off from situations. This comes from the American customs of constant protection and continual monitoring by parents. Clear boundaries have been drawn as to when it is acceptable to contact the coach, school, or board of directors, or in other words, “step in.” There exists another set of rules to determine when they should “back off,” or not do anything besides giving advice to their child as to how they should handle the situation. These boundaries develop in the front stage, and parents follow the front stage expectations.

One situation in which all parents in this study agree that they need to step in and discuss the situation with the coach is if their child is injured.

If there is a health issue, I am jumping in. I understand that there is a limited number of athletes, but if a kid is not ready to play and seems like between the coach and the trainer it should be 6 weeks, ah we can do it in 4 weeks. So, at that point I will jump in with all the concussions that are out there. If its health I am in, and the doctor will make the call, not the trainer. Other than that, if it's a situation that is, let's say the academics, I am jumping in. But as far as playing the game and what the coach and the players have going, that's theirs. If a player disagrees he can voice his opinion; take it up with the coach. (Jack Johnson, personal communication, March 1, 2011)

Parents agree that when it comes to a health situation, parents need to be the one to make the final call (with doctor's permission) on if their child should play. Also, parents feel that they have the right to make the final call when it comes to academic performance. If their child is not performing up to his ability and hockey is affecting their grades, parents feel that they have a

right to remove their child from participating until they see a positive change in their child's academic performance. Parents agree that these are acceptable times to contact coaches and easily fall within their role as parent of protecting their child. The hockey community supports parents in their front stage roles of "physical protector" and "academic protector."

Some parents struggle and are conflicted in other situations when they feel they should step in; usually, this internal conflict occurs in the backstage. One such situation is when they observe other parents not behaving appropriately at games. Some parents have a difficult time confronting other parents when they are not acting appropriately. In contrast, Maria Jones describes what she does when another parent is not acting appropriately.

I have spoken up in several occasions, even in the stands, during a game and turned to another parent. I have no problems speaking up if I see something inappropriate, or not being positive, or derogatory, or mean. You need to say five good things before you start condemning or saying mean things. I have no problem speaking up to anyone: child, another parent, my husband. It's pretty sad how things do get that way that the wife won't say anything like "you are embarrassing your son, yourself, this team." I have no problems saying it. Several do and several don't, and it's pretty much the same ones over and over again that we need to reprimand or that have been reprimanded from refs or the coaches or other parents. My god, the kids are 15. It's not the Olympics, it's a game- relax. (personal communication, Jan. 16, 2011)

Parents are aware that remarking on another person's inappropriate front stage behavior may be inappropriate front stage behavior itself. For many, however, the ability to know when to step in and when to back off is difficult. Parents understand that they need to allow their child to grow

and learn from their experiences, but sometimes their own desires and behavior inhibit this growth. Fulfilling their role as “good” hockey parent is difficult at times because it sometimes contradicts their normal role as parents. Parents are constantly interacting with one another and redefining their own expectations for their child and their team. At times, parents must step back from their director role to allow their child to learn the life lessons they want them to take away from hockey. They need to allow their child to interact with the coach and learn through these interactions. They can help their child process these interactions in the backstage, but they cannot direct and be part of the interaction in the front stage. This is difficult for many parents. Through their interaction with other parents, coaches, and their child, they define when it is appropriate to step in and when they need to back off.

### **Parents Co-Directing the Hockey Lessons Script**

When parents enroll their child in a sport, they ultimately want their child to learn something from the experience. Jessica Wilson describes, “by participating in sports you’re raising young men, the goal is that you’re really developing young men” (personal communication, March 1, 2011). While playing hockey, the child is learning valuable lessons they can apply throughout their life. The parents are fulfilling their role as “good” parents by insuring their child is learning the life lessons needed to be successful later on in life. Throughout this experience, the parent must allow their child to learn the hard lessons, without stepping in to rescue the child from every difficulty. The coach and parent must work together to co-direct the life lessons they want the players to learn. At the Bantam and High School levels, the coach often does most of the teaching in the front stage and the parent continues the lessons in the backstage. Working together, parents and coaches are able to help each player

grow. The following lessons are the ones parents identified as important lessons taught through sports.

**Be a team player.** Learning how to work as a team is a skill parents want their child to gain by participating in sports. George Thomas describes how teamwork is a skill that will help his son in his future career.

I'd like him to learn teamwork. Work as a team, work with others. As far as I'm concerned, that's the only way to get through real jobs. You have to get along with people and not argue about everything. But then again, argue your points and if you think something was wrong or whatever, make sure they're aware of it. For instance, if someone screws up in front of you, make sure they're aware of it, but don't be mean to them. It's all a team so you're all there together. (personal communication, Jan. 1, 2011)

Learning how to function as a group is a difficult task on which coaches continually work. Players struggle every year to develop their teamwork, and the team dynamics change every season. Learning to work with other people, respect one another, and help each other out in hard situations are all life skills parents want their child to take away from their sports participation. All parents in this study describe teamwork as being a valuable lesson which they want to ensure their child learns from their sports participation.

You need teamwork, the biggest thing I have learned, in my business, is you need to work with people; people you don't necessarily like but you still respect them, respect on the ice. I don't party with these people or socialize with these people, but I work with these people and we get the job done. The kids don't have to go over and have slumber parties or hug each other after the game. They

just have to respect each other on the rink and have playing respect. They need to move the puck, support their guy, pull the guy out of the pile if he loses his temper and drag him back to the bench; work as a unit and support each other, that whole teamwork idea. (Jack Johnson, personal communication, Dec. 23, 2010)

Sports facilitate an atmosphere where teamwork is necessary, and the skills the players use will carry forward to many aspects of their lives. Coaches direct lessons on the ice to help the players learn how to work as a team in the front stage. Parents draw connections in the backstage as to how effective teamwork is essential for their life.

**Work hard.** Along with teamwork comes the ability to work hard, both individually and as a team. Parents expect that their children learn the qualities of hard work and how working hard will pay off in the end.

I think the biggest thing to learn is if you get them to work hard and that what needs to be accomplished in a team sport such as hockey one guy can't do it. You have to have five guys pulling the wagon or driving the bus in order to make the bus go... What I tell my son, all the time, is you need to go to the game and compete. If you don't compete, you're toast. It's all about competing. It's all about (in your work world) getting out of bed in the morning, get into the office, get your stuff going, make your phone calls, do your appointments. Good things come to those who work hard. (personal communication, Dec. 23, 2011)

Parents expect that the skills their children learn on the rink carry over to both their school work and the way they will perform in their future jobs. They work with their child in the backstage to help them understand the value of working hard. The coach directs the front stage work to



ensure that players understand what hard work looks like. They run difficult drills, set-up challenging games, and skate the players hard so that they learn this valuable life skill.

Parents struggle when their child is not demonstrating hard work. George Thomas explains, “If he’s not performing as well as I think he can, or as well as he has, I get upset. I don’t even know how to describe it; more disappointment then that he’s not trying as hard I know he can” (personal communication, Jan. 19, 2011). It doesn’t matter if it is at practice or a game, hard work is expected. Parents feel that they can judge if their child is working hard. “Biggest thing is if your kid is working hard. Moms and dads know when your kid’s working hard. His working hard is different than someone else’s working hard; you know what they can do and what they can’t do” (Ben Campbell, personal communication, Dec. 22, 1010). If the child, coach, and parent disagree on the level of work the player is performing, it can cause conflict.

**Show good sportsmanship.** Parents also want to ensure that their children learn good sportsmanship throughout their sports participation. Learning how to compete fairly, be respectful to opponents, treat each other fairly, and act with humility are all skills parents want their child to learn through their sports participation. Parents are able to see these skills through their child’s interactions on the front stage.

I want him to learn to compete. I want him to learn to get back up after you’ve been knocked down. And I want him to know that it’s okay to cry, but not in front of the opponent. I want them to learn sportsmanship and not just at the end of the game when they shake hands, but with their own teammates when their having bad games. And when you get a good pass to appreciate your teammates,

and really build that ground swell from within and to lift each other up. I want them to learn some humility, I want them to be able to be selfless and distribute the puck. There are just so many things. (Mary Lee, personal communication, Jan. 10, 2011)

Teaching sportsmanship is difficult because it involves all players actively observing the rules of fair play, having respect for others, and being gracious after losing. All of these aspects of sportsmanship involve the character of the player. Teaching character is something all coaches should actively incorporate with the skills of the game. Parents expect coaches to direct lessons of good sportsmanship on the front stage. Parent's follow-up on these lessons in the backstage. If a player is successfully able to learn all aspects of being a good sportsman, this skill will be valuable throughout the remainder of his or her life.

Rachel Garcia explained how proud she was of the Bantam team's growth in sportsmanship. She shared a story about what happened at the end of the year banquet. She explained that Coach Smith got up and shared the news that he had been forwarded a message from the Midway rink. A grandparent from the last team, which they had played against in the end of the year state tournament, had called the rink and left a message. They had lost to this team 5-0. The grandparent was calling because her grandson shared that he was very impressed with the Midway boys and how sincere their handshakes were. She was surprised by this comment from her grandson, and took the time to call the rink to let the coach know. This statement was shared with all the parents and players at the end of the banquet (personal communication, March 16, 2011). Although sportsmanship is a difficult skill to learn, when good sportsmanship is displayed, others around take notice and learn from the experience.

Although good sportsmanship is appreciated backstage by individual parents, it is rewarding when it is acknowledged front stage, such as at the end-of-season banquet.

**Learn discipline and structure.** Through hockey, the parents expected their child to learn discipline and structure. Sports are set-up in a way that facilitates learning this lifelong skill. Players must make a commitment to attend all practices and games, behave appropriately, work hard, take care of themselves, and deal with the consequences of any problems which occur. Maria Jones explains,

You have your play time, your work time, and your school too... (Hockey) also teaches him balancing life in general, because of the practice times. He has to work on his homework and get that done too, and get that in on time. Eat properly, now that I am yapping about it, I think about how even diet is important, sleep is important. (personal communication, Jan. 16, 2011)

All of these routine aspects of life are important lessons in discipline and structure. Discipline and structure are not only taught in the front stage by the coach, but parents also actively teach these skills in the backstage. Coaches and parents work together to co-direct this life lessons. Coaches must hold the player responsible on the ice and parents must support this lesson away from the arena. In their homes away from others, parents help their child learn to balance their time, eat right, get homework in on time, etc. The coaches must enforce discipline and structure in the front stage, but parents also need to teach discipline and structure in the backstage for their child really to learn the lesson. If either the coach or the parent does not enforce discipline and structure, the child does not learn the appropriate lessons.

Youth hockey, as suggested in Figure 2, is a major commitment that requires discipline and structure in all aspects of the player's life. At the Bantam and High School levels, this commitment can be very time consuming. Players commit substantial time to hockey five to six days a week, improving their hockey skills and working with their teammates. Missing hockey for any reason besides sickness is seen as breaking their commitment to the sport. Players must balance their other home, school, and work responsibilities around hockey. Players are eased into the level of commitment throughout their years of participation in the sport. At the younger levels, players participate for fewer hours, fewer days of the week. The commitment required of players builds over the years requiring more time as players age. As players advance to the college level, the discipline and structure that are required to participate can take over their lives. Mary Lee explains about her son,

Would I like him to be successful? Yes. But, I also realize the price that comes with that too. By playing at that level, it's not everything it's cracked up to be. It's a job. They own you. You lose all your breaks, you lose a lot of freedom on the weekends, it's tough I want him to be happy. (personal communication, March 24, 2011)

Parents want the best for their children, and learning how to be disciplined and structured in all aspects of life is an invaluable skill. However, parents are cautious about sports consuming their child's entire life.

**Be responsible.** Parents want their child to learn to be responsible. If he or she is doing their homework on time, completing chores, working hard at practices and games or other business, their child is held accountable. Sports are an avenue where players can learn about responsibility and be held accountable for their actions. Because hockey is a team sport, not only

are the parents and coaches expecting the player to be responsible, so is the entire team. Parents and coaches work together to co-direct this lesson. At times, the responsibility can be too much for a player.

A lot of the times in the hockey world the first year, they're the young kids and then the 2<sup>nd</sup> year, they're the older kids. And, my son, a lot of times that 2<sup>nd</sup> year, would get thrust into that leadership role just by means of performance; and, it's funny because he doesn't want it. But, you try to get him to realize that other kids are depending on him to be an example, and sometimes he is not the right example. (Mark Anderson, personal communication, Jan. 13, 2011)

Taking on a leadership role and having the responsibility that comes with it can be daunting to many players. Coaches must teach the children on the front stage and parents must continue the lesson in the backstage. Together they must understand and teach the players responsibility for all aspects of their lives.

### **Losing the Dramaturgical Focus**

Throughout parents' involvement in their child's sports, they identify complaints that they want addressed. The way parents go about resolving this matter is often seen by others as a lapse in "good" parenting. Parents enroll their child in sports to ensure that they are teaching them all the necessary skills to be productive adults. Yet, the behavior discussed in this section is contrary to their ultimate goal. Ultimately parents want to direct their child to learn valuable life lessons. They do this by directing their child, often in the backstage, and acting out the lessons they want their child to learn, often in the front stage. Parents step out of their front stage role of being a "good" parent and display behavior that is in opposition to their ultimate goal.

Through their complaints and fears, parents are not teaching their child the skills the way they are supposed to as “good” parents.

The complaints are dependent on each parent’s personal experience. Blumer (as cited in Bogdan & Bilken, 2007) explains that when people interact and share experiences, they develop common definitions or “shared perspectives” (p.27). Because all individuals have different meanings which they bring into a common experience, the definition for the meaning is up for negotiation. When parents have a complaint, it is because the meaning they have assigned is different from that of someone else. Parents often bring this opposition to the other person’s attention in order to develop a new meaning. One reason for this is because parents do not have the same shared experience, as the child, coach, or other members of the team; yet, they often are taking the information their child has shared to develop their own meaning. This in itself causes a problem. Blumer goes on to explain, when people disagree about meanings, conflicts arise and new definitions may be formed causing change. Parents ultimately bring the complaint to the other’s attention to bring about change; however, conflict often occurs because a new meaning is not formed. The problem has been brought to the front stage, and all do not react to it uniformly.

When parents go off-script and step outside their front stage role, it is seen as inappropriate behavior by others. They are stepping outside of the appropriate behavior set by the generalized other. Yet, the individual does not see that their behavior is inappropriate. They still believe that they can direct their child to learn appropriate life lessons and behavior even though they are not demonstrating this behavior. In this section, I will examine hockey parent’s behavior that is off-script. I will start with the offences that other parents interpret as minor and then describe the more serious offenses.

**Inappropriate behavior because of referee calls.** Inappropriate parental behavior in the stands is often triggered by referee calls. Parents see these calls as being unfair and one-sided. Although there are usually three referees on the ice, they may all miss a call at times. Parents interpret these calls as a form of injustice if the ruling is against their child. This leads to poor sportsmanship and parents losing control at the hockey game, displaying inappropriate front stage behavior. Matthew White explains what he sees that triggers parents in the stands.

Well, bad calls, bad officiating is probably the biggest. Officiating is one of the leading causes of poor sportsmanship by parents, being thrown out of the arena, because the ref made a bad call and they continually hound on them. They call them names, they badger them and before you know it they're being thrown out of the arena. Now, if I am that kid on the bench and that's my dad getting thrown out of the arena and everybody knows who the kid is and everyone knows who the dad is... We, as parents, can't control referees. It's inevitable; it's just not going to happen. What we say doesn't matter. I try to teach the kids that too. You know if the referee makes a bad call there is nothing you can do or say to change that, so it's best for you to be humble and keep your mouth closed and move on; plain and simple. (personal communication, Feb. 24, 2011)

As we have seen in recent years, parents are acting on more and more of their frustrations. The meanings parents are placing on the calls are causing them to react in a negative way.

Most parents describe that when they feel they are going to lose control in the stands is directly related to calls made by the referee, though they do not necessarily identify this as the trigger for their behavior. Many parents interviewed described situations where they or someone

else reacted because of a referee call. Maria Jones describes how she went home and reflected on her first interview. She explains,

Yeah and I had this ah-ha moment... Things get out of hands in the stands whether it's a varsity game or my niece's D-12 game or my son's game or whatever it was really all the same reason. They weren't screaming at coaches, they were all screaming at what they saw as an injustice on ice. It was something not seen by the official. Every damn one of them went back to that. It went to inconsistent reffing or something that they missed. They can, they can mess up. But, see, going back to a call that was made for a child being intentionally injured or hurt; that was what it was all about. It didn't matter that it was their child either. It could have been my child and a different guy could have been sitting next to me and they'll scream. It is kind of protective in that it could have been any child, that they see someone intentionally charging or checking from behind. I am this old and I never looked at it this way, like: Mark is more vocal, George is more vocal, Big D was vocal. Yeah, they are all more vocal, but yeah, it is because of officiating. Yeah, I really, like duh, never thought of that. I did not; I was shocked. (personal communication, Jan. 19, 2011)

Parents realize the behavior in the stands is often unacceptable and not the behavior they want to teach to their child. Yet, they have not identified what triggers their behavior. Although parents agree that referee calls influence other parental behavior in the stands, this is not true for their own self - reflection. The parents recognize the inappropriate front stage behavior, but feel justified as protective parents. They feel that they can justify their own bad behavior yet can direct their child to behave differently. This is because they justify their behavior as being



protective yet they do not afford the same reasoning for their child. The behaviors that result are because the meanings parents place on the calls are different than those of most other people in the arena. The interaction that takes place is one sided and does not result in a mutual understanding. Parents view the situation as being a problem with the referee and not with themselves.

**Reacting to injustices.** Parents are very protective of their child and their child's teammates. One complaint many parents discussed was the fact that when they perceive that an injustice has occurred, it is difficult for them to control their emotions and behavior. They want to see the injustice righted. Mary Lee describes when she sees parents losing control of their emotions.

When they feel their kid's been wronged. Parents are very selfish, and I am very selfish, all parents are, me included. You know it's your kid and you've done everything within your power and when the parents feel like they don't have any power and their kid is at risk, the emotions kick in and that's when they lose control. It's when they feel like their kids have been wronged, everybody feels like their kid is owed something. (personal communication, March 24, 2011)

Parents personalize the injustice as occurring to them. The situation usually is completely removed from the parent, yet they are feeling and interpreting the emotions in the stands. Jessica Wilson describes, "You feel like an injustice has occurred; that there isn't fairness. For me, personally, that would be the time that I have been the most frustrated; is it feels unjust for them" (personal communication, March 1, 2011). Parents act inappropriately as a way to stand up for their child. Yet, they still direct their child to act appropriately. The injustice can be a call from

the referee, their child not receiving enough playing time, their child being penalized for their actions on the ice, another child being injured, or any other act the parents deem as unjust.

Parents also describe times when they feel that coaches are being unjust. Because parents are not working personally with the coach as their child is, they are interpreting what they see and hear from their child as the last word. Some of the complaints parents voice are: 1) coaches lying to parents, 2) coaches choosing the best players at a young age and not re-evaluating children year to year, 3) coaches penalizing players for being late to practice when it was their parents' fault, 4) coaches not communicating expectations with players, 5) penalizing players for not performing up to their expectations. In each of these situations, parents have assigned meaning to an interaction in which they themselves were not an active participant. Interactions occur backstage between individual players and coaches. Because parents are assigning meaning to second hand information from their child, often these situations are exaggerated. It is only when the parent takes the time and openly works to see both the child's and the coaches' views that they truly understand the situation. Open discussion illuminates situations on the front stage. When this occurs, the meaning parents assign to the interaction changes and the conflict is often resolved.

**Living vicariously through their child.** One complaint parents have is that many other parents "live through their child," when it comes to sports. Because many of the parents, especially the fathers, have participated in the sport themselves at one time, many act as experts and expect their child to live up to their expectations. These parents set themselves up as the authority backstage, while front stage the coach is the authority. Jack Johnson explains how other parents live through their child instead of allowing the child to play the game and support them along the way.

I think a lot of them play the game through their kid. The kid does no wrong, well, no ever kid is going to do it wrong in their parent's eyes. That is why the coach is there to instruct them, to teach them to do it correctly or do it the way he wants it done. The system, run the system; and I think the other thing is lack of knowledge by the parent. I mean, I don't want to pick on the ladies, but some of the ladies they just don't understand the game, they never played it. When you're third period and you're dying out there, "Oh you have to go faster Johnny." It's towards the end of the game, and yeah, we can condition all we want; but, some days you're just not feeling it, you just don't have that giddy-up that you would like.

Some hockey moms, I hate to say it; but, hockey moms are tough. The hockey dads, a lot of the times it's the guy that played a little bit of hockey and thinks that he is Gretzky. [Parents have] unrealistic expectations of the child, that goes back to not living it, but supporting it. It also boils down to those W's [wins] and L's [losses]. It's not always, you want to win right, but it's not always. What do you learn and what can you take from the game, and then, get better. Change it so you can get the W next time. It's not a guarantee on the ice and we are going to win, or we're going to play a [high ranked team] and we are going to get killed. They still put their skates on the same way we do. You play the game, that's why you schedule the game. You can kind of gage yourself how good your program is, and take it from there. (personal communication, Dec. 23, 2010)

The expectations parents place on the game may not be the same as their child's. Because parents are bringing their prior perspectives to the game and not a "shared perspective," conflict

can arise. When the conflict arises, parents struggle to step back and base their meaning on the “shared perspective” that they are experiencing with their child and the team. Instead, they set unrealistic expectations for their child and it results in conflict with their child, other parents, coaches, and their child’s teammates. The parent directs the actions of their child even at times when it hinders their child’s learning. It is difficult to resolve this type of conflict, because the parent refuses to look at the situation from a different view. This can result in continued conflict or the child eventually dropping out of the sport.

Unfortunately, parents can become too involved in their child’s game, and negative behavior can take over. When parents become so engrossed in seeing their child succeed, their behavior can turn negative when they feel their child is not being successful. Jessica Wilson describes how hockey parents are very passionate. When asked where the passion comes from, she said, “I suppose competitiveness, don’t you think? I don’t know. They want their kid to do well. Their kids are ranked amongst other kids, and they want their kid to look well, good. So, I suppose it’s that” (personal communication, Jan. 3, 2011). Some parents want their child to be the best and struggle when this is not happening. They see this as a failure on their part. They feel that they were not successful at directing their child to learn the skills and lessons they want.

Some parents overly invest their own emotions into their child’s game. Jessica Wilson continues, “When they have success, it’s fun to see their happiness and excitement that they feel. It can just be getting their first goal, anything. Knowing that they made the right move or the right play, it can be just the littlest of things, all the little things add up” (personal communication, Jan. 3, 2011). By experiencing the successes and losses with their child, at times, parents develop a different meaning for the sport than their child. These different assigned meanings can cause conflict and parents’ behavior can turn negative. All the hard work

and support they have supplied in the backstage is not being shown in the front stage to other parents. They have been unsuccessful directors. Some parents see this as a failure on their part.

Many parents stated that the main reason other parents live the game through the child is because they played the game themselves and see hockey parenting as an extension of it. Matthew White explains, “I think the biggest thing I see is there are just too many parents out there that live through their kids. I see it in the Mini-Mites, I see it in High School, I see it in Bantams” (personal communication, Feb. 24, 2011). Parents at all levels base their perspective on their own playing experience. He continues, “And, I always said, I think that’s our biggest attribute that I have right now is being a hockey parent is that I was never a hockey player. That’s the biggest bonus I have, because I’m on the outside looking in.” Participation in the sport itself is not a precursor to having conflict and living through their child. However, it is one notable experience that parents need to take into account, when they enroll their child in a sport. It is important for parents to be able to step back and realize that their current experience with their child is different than their own past experience. The “shared perspective” that parents are experiencing with their child should shape the meaning they assign to hockey, not the one they formed when the parents were playing hockey.

**Parents playing referee from the stands.** When parents attend games, they naturally become involved. They want to see their child and their child’s team play to the best of their ability. However, they can become so engaged that they step out of a parental role and step into a referee role while in the stands. They yell out penalties, state calls that went the wrong direction and yell at the referee to watch for certain behavior. However, this is not their role while in the stands, and it causes conflict with other parents. They are focused only on themselves and do not take on the role of the generalized other. Mark Anderson describes,

Well, sooner or later you're in a game, things are tense. There's a play that, to me, is obviously the fault of the other kid, and I hear another parent screaming because he feels it's the other way. It wasn't his kid's fault, it was our kid's fault; and so, sooner or later, somebody's going to say 'you watching the same game as I am?' When you have 2 adult males that are both getting mad about something, I can see where that escalates in a hurry. (personal communication, Jan. 13, 2011)

Both parents assign their own meanings to the call. Conflict occurs when the meanings assigned do not align with each other. Neither parent is acting according to the values and expectations of the generalized other. Often the conflicts arise because neither parent is willing to step back and see it from the other viewpoint. Until parents begin to realize that there are other views of the situation, and that their emotions are based on the meaning which they have assigned to the event, this behavior will continue.

Fortunately some parents realize that although they are not able to solve the conflict, they have the ability to take themselves out of the situation. Rachael Garcia explains,

I mean, I've had to myself stand up and walk away because of some other fan making calls. I just couldn't take anymore, and that's what you gotta [sic] do. Get up walk away from that area or what's gonna [sic] happen is you're gonna find your blood pressure going up; and you feel yourself losing control. (personal communication, March 16, 2011)

Knowing when to walk away from a situation is not something all parents are willing to do. This is a problem that is becoming increasingly present at hockey games. Without working with the parents to help them see other views and develop a common meaning to their interactions, this behavior will continue to be seen in the hockey arena. This task is especially difficult because

each parent is coming from their own team, with their own past, and bringing different meaning to the game. Often the parents in conflict will never have a conversation with one another, which does not involve yelling itself. The parents are front stage, and maintaining their “good parent” roles is expected. The challenge is to change behavior on a societal level to help parents process and effectively work to understand each other’s view and generate a common meaning.

**Engaging in physical conflict.** The most egregious way a parent can step out of their front stage behavior and go off-script is by engaging in physical violence. Reports have shown that parents are engaging in more physical violence while attending their child’s sporting events (Apache, 2004). While this trend continues to rise, other parents see this behavior as inappropriate. While conducting this study, one parent did engage in a physical action when Midway was playing a rival team. A student carrying the Midway school flag continued to run back and forth in front of all the stands, including the rival team’s stands. This continued for some time. A parent witnessing this behavior saw a younger man step in front of the student with the flag and take the flag. The parent felt that this was inappropriate and went down to confront this younger gentleman. Upon doing so, he pushed the younger gentleman and engaged in an argument. Security was quickly called, and the father removed from the arena. It later became apparent that the gentleman he had pushed was the Athletic Director for the rival team. These incidents are becoming more common in the athletic arena. When parents engage in physical violence, they step completely outside their role as “good” parent and director.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Adults' Backstage Reflections on Each Others' Roles**

Sports parents spend a tremendous amount of time at sporting events as their child ages. From the first time hockey parents help their child to put on their skates to attending high school games, they find themselves invested in the sport. Throughout their time participating, parents learn the appropriate adult social behaviors that are accepted in their specific sports community. They learn the specific values and expectations of the community as a whole by taking on the role of the generalized other. These parental behaviors alter and change as a child progresses from a young Mini-Mite (who needs constant protection and lots of direction) to Bantam and High School (when the child has much more freedom and the parents need to pull back). In this chapter, a continuum of parenting expectations across the spectrum of hockey will be analyzed.

Parents and coaches work together to co-direct the life lessons they want the athletes to take away from their sports participation. In doing so, parents have specific expectations of the coaches, and coaches have specific expectations of the parents. These expectations are backstage reflections and are not generally discussed on the front stage. Throughout this chapter, the coaches' expectations of parents and the parents' expectations of the coaches are examined.

#### **Coaches' Expectations of Parents**

Coaches have specific expectation of parents. These backstage reflections define the way coaches expect parents to interact during their child's hockey season. As players progress from mini-mites to Bantam, the role the parents play changes. The coaches' expectations of parents are redefined as player grow and develop throughout their years in hockey. At the Bantam level, coaches describe the following expectations they have for parents: support your child, be



positive, be realistic, support the coach, communicate, and realize the differences between the parent and coach relationship with the player.

**Parental development throughout their years in hockey.** When parents enroll their child in a sport, they come into the experience with certain expectations and background knowledge. As the child moves through the different levels of sport, those expectations are redefined and altered. This occurs because the meaning parents assign to the sport is altered based on their interactions with the coaches, other parents, and their own children.

In general, when parents first enter hockey they are open and looking for their child to have a positive sports experience and learn life skills. Within a few years, this begins to change. Coach Williams reflects on how he sees parents change throughout their years participating in hockey.

New parent coming in, the majority are still coming in with eyes wide open.

Their kids are still playing because they want their kid to experience hockey and have a good experience. You know, and they get through the first couple of years and it's kind of how it goes and as they move through, end of mites, end of about 8 years old from about 8 to 11 they kind of get really confused about what they should do, who they should hang with, you know, the whole social aspect of it.

Should your kid be playing this in the offseason? Should they be doing that?

What group should they be hanging with? It can get real confusing for them.

And then, as you get to be Bantam, parents they kind of find their niche and either they are happy with it or they are not. So, I think they go through a whole, like kids go through a whole social experience, so do their parent. And, you know, I think for some of them, depending on their group, it can be a really good

experience and for some of them it can be a really bad experience. (Coach Williams, personal communication, May 14, 2012)

The connections parents make throughout their child's sports participations prove valuable. In most sports, the group of parents stays together as a group from the time their child enters the sport throughout their high school years. In the younger years, they are connected only with the other parents of their child's age and team. Once their children enter high school, the connections move from their original small parent group, to include everyone involved in the high school program. Throughout their time together, parents script their experience, establishing expectations of one another, their child, and the coaches.

When first entering into the sport, parents are active participants in the team. They are willing to do anything that will make their child's experience the best that it can be. This begins to change as the child gets older and becomes more independent. Coaches see the change starting at around ten years old. The parents' behavior changes after this point. The dramaturgical script that was acceptable at the younger age begins to change.

When they are younger they all want to help out and get on the ice and work the penalty box and do whatever it takes to help the young ones. But as they get older and the kids separate, they pretty much want to just go to the game and watch. They don't want to be involved as much. Some, not all of them, but that is what I see in most the parents. (Coach Taylor, personal communication, May 15, 2012)

Unfortunately, coaches do not perceive this change in behavior as being positive for the athlete, the parent, or the team. Coach Taylor shares his insight into how older parents become less involved and their discussions often turn to negativity and blame.

They all want to sit up in the stands as they get older and complain and bitch about the coaches. It's all about playing time, no matter how you look at it. But, when they get older, they really want to blame the coaches more than anything.

(Coach Taylor, personal communication, May 15, 2012)

Coaches often discuss how parents of younger, dependent athletes are initially positive and more than willing to help in any way needed. As their child moves through the levels, and independence is encouraged in the athletes, parents become less willing to help and more critical of the coaching and the program. This behavior can be heard in the stands and parents seem more tolerant of this type of complaining, as the parental role changes from participant to observer. Coach Williams explains why he believes coaches are currently the target for complaints.

So these parents have expectations that their kids are going to be some type of player that is maybe somewhat unrealistic. Somebody is going to pay the price for that eventually, and right now the coaches are paying it. In the parent's mind the coaches are not delivering. Well, if my kid played on this AAA team and he did this and he did that and did this, my God, he gets this really nice fancy jersey and then goes back and plays for his association and he's not on the first line.

He's not on the power play. It has to be somebody's fault. Coaches are going to be the target. It's gotten bad and it's going to get worse before it gets better. But,

coaches are under a lot of undo pressure. The helicopter parent thing comes into play. It's almost like a perfect storm right now. It's about helicopter parents have been around for what, studies have been out for about 10 years, so things are really escalating. You notice all kinds of articles about the new born baby and who their best friend is going to be is going to their parent, not their friend. So that's what's coming to a head while the coach is going to suffer because the coach can't be the mentor role model. Well, I'm worried that they can't be the mentor role model that they used to be because the parents are going to try and guide everything. (Coach Williams, personal communication, May 14, 2012)

Currently, coaches are under tremendous pressure from parents. The expectations are extremely high, and each parent expects that their child to succeed. As a result, the pressure on coaches from parents has never been as high. The parenting styles described earlier – the helicopter parent (who hovers over the child), Tiger Mom (who pushes the child) and Pressure Cooker Parent (who has extreme expectations for the child) have all been brought to the hockey arena, causing tension between parents and the coaches.

Compounding the social challenges that are currently affecting sports, another challenge coaches are facing is that parents have a hard time seeing anything except their child's team and age level. Parents want immediate success for their child, and often do not have patience for gradual improvement of skills throughout a program. This is especially true when parents look for information to help their child improve.

You know people used to look to the high school coach or the Bantam A coach for guidance and they would seek out information. Now, they'll get information

from somebody whose kid plays on a AAA team or an all star baseball team and they will think that that's the information. Because their perspective is so narrow and short. It's hard for them to look beyond their age group. They can maybe look one year, but parents used to be able to look at program. .. Well now parents look at the team or the age group, or maybe the one kid ahead of them. So, they think the Bantam A player if their kid is a PeeWee, they think the top Bantam A player is it. And, if he is the top player, he must have done this. What did he do to be the top Bantam A player? While back in the day, people looked at the top high school player or the top college player and they had a broader perspective. Or they didn't even worry about it. Now they worry about it. But their perspective is so short. It's that whole patience and development thing. There is no more patience. (Coach Williams, personal communication, May 14, 2012)

Parents today are focused on their team, as are the parents with whom they socialize. These are the individuals who they turn to for information. When one of their associates' children is succeeding, they turn to them for guidance on how to help their own child succeed.

Unfortunately, looking for advice from older parents or coaches is a rare occurrence. As parents move through the different levels of sports, the expectations change. The meanings they assign to sports are altered by their interactions with one another. The following expectations were outlined by Bantam and High School parents, as to what they wanted from their child's sports participation.

**Support your child.** Coaches expect that parents support their child. Coaches expect parents to show support emotionally and financially. Also expected from parents is the ability to be someone with whom the player can talk. Coaches recognize that children cannot play hockey

without the support of their parents, yet coaches state that, at the High School and Bantam level, parents need to understand that their role is mainly to provide support.

The role of a sport parent is to provide support and a means for your child to participate in athletics. And, I can define support by saying that that means that you pay the fees, help them with equipment, and help them with registration. And, you are mostly a passive participant allowing the coach to coach; and if you are active in like a booster club, then really finding a healthy emotional position with that. (Coach Martin, personal communication, Jan. 14, 2010)

Finding the healthy relationship is where parents struggle.

The role parents fill does not always match the role the coach would like to see them to fill. When parents are a positive support, Coach Smith explains, parents can be a great asset to their child's development.

Yeah, hockey parents can be some of the greatest influence in their kids' life, if they're thoughtful and supportive. And, boy, they can be detrimental in a hurry too. I have seen kids go into a shell that it just tears at your heart, when you know, and they don't do it vindictively or meanly. It's probably the way they were raised, if I had to guess. They just don't know anything else. (personal communication, Nov. 23, 2010)

Parents and coaches must develop a "shared perspective" for the benefit of all the players.

**Be positive.** Coaches expect parents to be positive with their child about the sport. Coaches discuss how parents are quick to find the negatives of their child's performance and this seems to drive their discussions. Instead of focusing on the positive aspects of their child's

performance, often, parents look at the negative. Coach Taylor explains how he sees the problem with parents' negativity.

My main thing is I wish the parents would be more positive instead of coaching their kids in the car, and jumping down their throat if they're not doing well. Or, I just wish that they would hone in more on the positives than the negatives. Every parent gets in the car with their kid; and instead of being positive, they tell them all the things they did wrong. And, if they just let the coach's just coach, and let them enjoy the game, it would be better for everybody. I think we have had too many parent coaches that don't get it; they get too involved in their kids' heads. And, they, the kids, get an attitude on the ice, 'Well my dad said I should have done this', 'I should have been better at this', 'I did this good', 'How come I am not playing?' I just think I would like to see the parents just enjoy the game and let the coach's coach. If they can do better, then they should be out on the ice coaching them. We're not perfect. It's not a perfect world. (personal communication, Dec. 9, 2010)

It is important for parents to understand their role and not take on the coaching role. The coach and parent roles are different, and it is important that each play their own part. When parents choose to cross over to the coaching role, the player is the one who is ultimately hurt. This is especially true because the parent is coaching backstage, and the front stage coaches are not aware of what is being said to the athlete behind the scenes.

**Be realistic.** Parents who enter sports with realistic expectations of the accomplishments of their child will have a better sports experience. Unfortunately, coaches see many parents

who have unrealistic expectations for their child and, therefore, have set themselves and their child up for failure.

I think that when a parent goes in with realistic expectations and understands that there are no guarantees to certain privileges, usually they have a better experience as a sport parent. And, what I mean by that is the biggest road block or the biggest challenge I see is for parents is to stay away from that roll that says they are going to be active in the decision making and expect a certain set of decisions, to be made about their son through the coach. (Coach Martin, personal communication, Jan. 14, 2011)

When a parent expects that their child will play professionally, receive a set amount of playing time, score X amount of goals each game, be the team captain, and so on, they have set unrealistic expectations that typically are disappointed in the end. Coach Martin goes on to explain why he thinks these parents have these unrealistic expectations.

I think that the root of it starts early with the investment of the time. I think I heard you talk about money, camps, clinics, and all those things start at a very young age. And, there's this set of expectations built up in the parent that, so often, the bubble just bursts. And when they hit High School and maybe it happens earlier, they have to come to the realization that I better do this for my reasons. If I do it for playing time or if I do it for a certain expectations that are going to be subjecting decisions by coach down the road, there is a good chance I'm going to be disappointed. I'm not going to get that time back. If you continue to live in those, have fun, make friends, support each other, learn hard work and commitment those things persist. If your expectations are for your kids



to learn those things through sport, people are usually pretty happy. But, that is kind of a special thing going on because society is set up to add that big magic moment at the end. Wow, that's my child in the lime light, and we paid and put in the time and here we are. (personal communication, May 14, 2012)

It is important for parents to have a clear understanding of what they do and do not control. Every parent wants their child to be successful in sports. However, the way they define success is so important to their child's and their own enjoyment of the game. It is important for parents, child, and coach to all understand each other's expectations and what they want to achieve from the season. Without this clear communication and a common meaning assigned to the sport, conflict will arise and the season will not be enjoyable.

**Be supportive of the coach.** Coaches interact with most players six days a week at the High School and Bantam level. The coach himself is a teacher as well as a coach and is working to better the athlete. When parents and coaches have not developed shared meaning for the sport, the child is often put into a situation where he or she is hearing two separate messages. Coach Smith describes how he addresses this at parents' meetings.

I talked to the parents about...if they have any questions, please, before trying to straighten their child out on the way home from the rink, to please contact me and we can at least talk through, if there is a difference in opinion or philosophy or whatever it happens to be. So, I think that the model parent would do that, would fall in line of what the coach wants. And, any discussions would take place between he or she and I and that we could get an oriented front and at least give a consistent front to the kids. Consistency is everything to these guys (personal communication, Nov. 23, 2010).

Taking the time to understand the coach's viewpoint and come to a common understanding takes time and does not always happen. Often, these conversations occur in the back stage and are never brought to the rink in the front stage. This is difficult because the child is placed between the coach and parent; and yet, the coach often doesn't even know there is a conflict. This presents a big problem for all members involved.

I think some of the biggest faults from parents are that after every game they say, "Oh, you played great, Jimmy." "You were great." "You were fantastic, Joey, that was fantastic." "You're the best." Instead of saying, "how do you think you played?" and "What did the coach say?", and those are just learning things. And, of course, they're parents and they always have the spotlight on their child. Or, on the other side, like, I know that we have some kids that just get it really hard from their parents on the way home. And, to have a happy medium is to support the kids all the time and support the coaching staff and say, "Oh, why didn't you get enough playing time?" "Well, what are you going to do to get more?" And, approaching it that way, "Are you doing something extra?" "Have you talked to the coaches?" "What can you do?" It's just like homework, like "Why didn't you get an 'A'?" We'll go in to talk to the teacher, cause [sic] you can see what you can do to get that extra. Instead of, "Oh, I think you're screwed." "I think they just don't like you." And, I don't know if that happens, and I hope that doesn't happen, but the easy thing to do is either hang it up or say "Oh, they just, you know, make excuses." Well, I think you played, and it's up to the kids sometimes, too. To say, "I didn't mom, I didn't play very good and this is why I got sacked" or, "This is why I didn't get enough ice time." But, those are lessons that we try

to teach the kids throughout the year. (Coach Brown, personal communication, March, 30, 2011)

Asking questions of their child, instead of projecting the meaning the parents have assigned to their child's performance, will help ensure meaning is developed from a shared experience. Parents must ensure that their goal is the same as that of the coach. It is counterintuitive for parents to work against the coach. When the coaches and parents have a shared understanding, the children have a much better experience.

**Communicate as parent.** Communication is key to ensuring parents and coaches are able to work together for the best of the team. When communication has broken down, shared meanings cannot be formed, shared perspectives are lost, and conflict cannot be resolved. This results in an unpleasant season for all participants. There is a trend of parents talking amongst one another about problems and not involving the coach in the discussion. Coach Williams explains how there has been an increase in communication among parents in the stands that is not warranted.

“Yeah, there is a lot of communication amongst parents. I wouldn't say ‘a lot’ but more today than there was 10 years ago. It's a detrimental effect on athletics across the country, just because of false fears. They don't ask questions of coaches, and they put up these walls with coaches. If they just asked coaches, the parents are more on the same page than not. (personal communication, March 16, 2011)

Parents must ensure that when they have a problem and there is a conflict, they talk to the coach.

The underlying challenge for parents is evaluating when it is appropriate to talk with the coach about a problem and when is it best to let the child handle the situation themselves. Coach Williams explains his philosophy,

I think that if their kids are feeling: left out, troubled, bullied, disenfranchised from the team; I think they should encourage their son or daughter to talk to the coaches, to talk to the captains, and you know, be listened to by the coaches. I think if it gets to any, any deeper than that, and the coaches aren't aware of everything that's going on, I think the parents then should sit down with the son or daughter and have a conversation. (personal communication, Nov. 15, 2010)

Parents must remember that this is their child's experience and not their own. When parents know and play their roles and do not try to live through their child, most of the conflict is resolves itself. It is the parents who struggle with their roles that have the most conflict. Charles William continues,

Now my best parents, I have had phenomenal parents, matter of fact 95% of them have been phenomenal. They ask questions, they want the best for their kid, and we don't always agree, but they aren't afraid to reach out. (personal communication, Nov. 15, 2010)

Knowing when to talk with the coach and when to step back and allow their child to learn from the experience is important for parents. Coach Brown suggests the 24 hour rule,

I think that there is a hot time that after any game when parents are fired up whether it be a win or a loss situation or playing time. I think a lot of coaches

have a 24 hour rule, where they can't speak to the coach until 24 hours, until they settle down and have time to think about the situation; and then, they can contact the coach. (personal communication, Dec. 2, 2010)

When conflict is present and it is not something the child needs to resolve, it is important for parents to contact the coach to discuss the situation and work towards a shared perspective.

### **Parents Expectations of Coaches**

Coaches are an active part of every sports team. They play an important role in the player's development. Coaches are the leaders of the team and parents put their child's sports development into their hands. In the sports arena, parents have to take a back seat role in the child's development and watch as another adult helps their child grow. This can be especially difficult for helicopter parents who are used to actively being involved in all aspects of their child's life. The following are backstage reflections by parents, as to what they expect a coach to teach their child throughout the season.

**Improve my child's hockey skills.** Parents want to see improvement of the sport's skills in their child and the team over the course of the season. The way they determine this improvement varies from parent to parent. Some parents base it off statistics such as win/loss records or their own child's statistics, such as goals scored. Others base it off the season record. Ben Campbell explains how he determines if his son improves over the season.

I expect the kids to be better at the end of the year than they were at the beginning of the year. You know, nothing worse than being on a team that beats a team 8 -0 at the beginning of the year and then gets beat by that team 8-0 at the end of the year. (personal communication, Dec. 22, 2010)

Through communicating with coaches, players, and other parents, parents determine if their own child is improving. Most parents are satisfied that their child has grown throughout the season. It is only when expectations are different and communication is not effective that parents are not happy with their child's level of improvement.

**Be in control and coach.** Parents place a lot of responsibility on coaches. Ultimately, parents trust the coach with their child's development, season success, and overall enjoyment during the season. Parents expect that the coach is in control of the program at all times and knows what is going on with their team. They also expect the coach to understand the developmental needs of their players and ensure that their players are being taught the skills correctly. Mary Lee exemplifies how parents want the coach to be in control and help her child develop.

I think that it is really evident with coaches when they're not an instructional coach and they're just yelling 'go, hustle, hustle, go, shoot, hustle' instructions. The best coaches give specific feedback, and that's hard because they get caught up in the heat of the moment instead of relaxing and teaching, because coaching is teaching. (personal communication, March 24, 2011)

Coaches must be good teachers to be successful. Mary Lee goes on,

I think that coaches need to sandwich their criticism of kids. Start with the positive, end with a positive and do the critiquing in the middle, because a lot of kids take it personally. You have to get a kid in a good point of mind if they just came off the ice and they screwed up. They know they screwed up, so you find something good that they've done. 'Good hustle, but the last time down the ice,

here's what you did well, where did it go wrong this time?' Those kids know that they did it wrong, so it doesn't do any good to beat them into the ground.

Parents feel that the coach is in control when their child is receiving positive feedback and being taught.

Parents struggle when they feel the coach is not teaching their child and/or they feel that the coach is not in charge of the team. Most parents are very supportive of coaches and the coaches' decisions.

I have always been a firm believer in that the coaches have the right direction, whether the parents agree with what the coaches do or not. It's the coaches' decisions. We can all have our own idea and thoughts, but when it all comes down to it, it really isn't for us to try to be involved in our kids' athletics. I think it is wrong. Because we can guide them at home and we can teach them outside of their school sports, we can coach them in the summer time and in the off season and those kinds of things. But, as far as when it comes to when their under the direction of their High School coaches, it's the coaches' decision- it's pretty much final. (Linda White, personal communication, Jan. 3, 2011)

Parents understand that it is their role to support the coach. They struggle when they feel the coach is not adequately doing his or her job, or feel that the coach has lost control of the team. When this occurs, parents and coaches are not communicating effectively. The meaning parents and coaches place on the coach's role differs. When this happens, conflict occurs and parents lose respect for the coach. The only way this conflict can be resolved is through working to understand each other's view and coming to a common understanding. Without this common

meaning, parents lose trust in the coach and work to take over, so that their expectations for their children's performance can be met.

**Communicate with the athletes.** Parents at the Bantam and High School levels understand that it is their child's game and not theirs. This is a change in parenting behavior from the younger age groups. Although parents are always involved with the sport, they expect coaches to be interacting and communicating on a daily basis with their child. Parents expect that the communication between the coach and the athlete is specific, explains their role on the team, and helps them improve. Jack Johnson describes how he expects coaches to communicate with his son.

These are very young, impressionable 15, 16, 17, 18-year-olds. Tell them what you want, tell them what you need, the dos and don'ts and I think a lot more explanation. If you do something wrong, you need to explain it, draw it. (personal communication, March 1, 2011)

Parents expect this type of communication to happen on a daily basis. As children grow and mature from Mini-Mites to Bantam to High School players, the communication techniques coaches and parents utilize change with the developmental level of the players. When children feel that they are not receiving this communication from their coach, parents become upset and are less satisfied with the coach overall.

**Communicate early with parents.** Communication between the coach and player is different than that between the coach and the parents. Parents do not expect daily communication between the coach and themselves. At the High School and Bantam level, parents understand that it is their child's responsibility to talk to the coach about their skills and



the problems or areas they can improve. However, parents do feel that it is the coach's responsibility to communicate with parents if there are problems with their child which they can step in and help resolve. George Thomas explains what communication he would like to receive from the coach. "I like being informed if, for instance, he's doing something that they don't like, or if there's issues with other kids, or they're not wearing the right things for hockey practice" (personal communication, Jan. 19, 2011). Because the opinions of necessary information differ from coach to parent, parents may become frustrated when they have not been told of an issue they could have helped resolve. Early communication is important, and parents welcome coaches contacting them when a problem occurs.

When there is not communication, parents speculate as to the situation. "Parents talk and they talk about what they think is going on, what they think the coach is thinking. There is a lot of speculation" (Jessica Wilson, personal communication, March 1, 2011). When communication is not flowing in a two way direction, parents speculate as to the coach's coaching and decisions. Parents admit that communication is difficult, because they would like to see their child at the High School and Bantam levels take responsibility for much of the communication with the coach. Jessica continues,

I don't know if there is a right answer to how much information they should let out. It's just their decision making and why they do the things they do; because, I suppose, they have a reason for why they do what they do. Parents always question it.

Not being involved in the aspects of the decision making is difficult for some parents. Because the parents are not privy to all the information the coach has, there are often different meanings placed on the decisions. This is a difficult position for the parents, because they almost never are

allowed to step into the role of the coaches and see all the information the coach is using to make their decisions.

Parents also expect the coach to communicate early with parents about the schedule and team activities. One frustration of parents is when this information is provided with little time to prepare and plan. Jessica Wilson explains how communication can be a challenge for athletes, parents, and coaches.

Some of the challenges are communication. Sometimes, things came out the day of, the day before. I think it would be nice to have a heads-up on things.

Especially with the parent, if you need to plan and you have other kids to take here or there, and you know. So, I think that communication could have been planned better and then, maybe that's just a lack of planning. I don't know.

(personal communication, March 1, 2011)

When possible, parents need to have communication early in the season about the schedule. A large amount of parental frustration is formed when parents have to quickly rearrange their schedules because the coach did not give adequate notice about the schedule.

**Play my child.** Playing time, or the amount of time the child is actually on the ice, is the biggest complaint coaches hear from parents. Yet, in all the interviews, no parents discussed this as a complaint. Discussing playing time is something private, a backstage activity. Front stage, parents need to maintain their supportive “good parent” roles.

99% of the time its playing time, or their perceived roll of the player on the team and then, what's usually precipitated is their lack of communication and listening with the player. In almost all of those cases, the most recent one, I can track it back to the player. The dad and the mom never talking to the player because the

player clearly, when we sorted through the whole situation, the player apologized for the parents because the player knew exactly what their role was. They communicated with me, I communicated with them, but the parent was upset with the ice time, what was perceived as the lack of the role of the player and they just hadn't listened to the player. That was really frustrating to the player; that the parents hadn't listened to them. (Coach Williams, personal communication, March 16, 2011)

Because parents are removed from the direct situation, often what they are discussing with their child is different than what their child is discussing with the coach. This presents a problem because the parent is not the one involved in the interaction. The conflict arises because they are trying to put meaning on a situation in which they are an outsider. When this occurs, parents are upset. The most direct way for parents to resolve this conflict is to discuss the issue with the coach and listen to his or her view. Each coach has his or her own way of coaching and determining who gets playing time. Coach Smith explains the way he assigns playing time.

I am a huge rewarder of effort, not skill, but effort during the week of practice leading into the game, is heavily rewarded for me. Player 'X' doesn't have to be the one who is going to score 4 goals the next game. He needs to be the one working as hard as everyone else at practice; and that's as simple as that. So, I would say that is the top one. (personal communication, Nov. 23, 2010)

When parents understand coaches' expectations and communicate openly with coaches, often this problem can be resolved.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **Dynamics of the 'Hockey Family'**

It's 3:30 in the afternoon on a cold, bright, sunny Sunday afternoon. Parents begin pulling into the local hockey arena. Young men between the ages of 14 and 15 begin getting out of the vehicles with their large hockey bags, sticks, skates, and other equipment. The boys quickly grab their items and disappear inside. The parents take their time gathering their own items from the vehicles and head into the arena themselves.

Many parents greet each other in the lobby. The lobby is adorned with trophies the Midway hockey team has won over the years, pictures of current Midway Hockey teams, bulletin boards filled with announcements, training opportunities, and other important information. The lobby is the place in the arena that shows off the association's accomplishments.

The players have long disappeared into the locker room to meet their teammates and get ready for their 5:15 game. Parents gather in the lobby and greet one another before making their way into the arena. Once inside, they go about their normal routine. Not all parents in this study stay, as this is a home game. Home games give them an opportunity to take care of some errands before the team takes the ice. This is a unique opportunity where the parents do not have to always be at the arena with their child. Some parents chose to gather around the glass discussing the season, strategy for the game, how players are performing, and other small talk. Many other parents make their way into the stands. They pull out their own diversions. Some bring jewelry projects, a book, work, or other activities to fill their time. Many of the women share their activities with one another. One mother takes out her jewelry and shows it off to the other parents. Another discusses the book she is currently reading. Looking around, many of the parents are wearing Midway apparel to distinguish them from the opposing team.

Soon after, the opposing team's parents begin entering the arena. They are wearing their team's respective apparel. They quietly find a section of bleachers which are empty and find seats. They also bring activities to fill their time until the game begins. The two team's parents generally do not interact. They stay seated on opposite ends of the bleachers.

As the teams take the ice for warm-up, the parents momentarily are distracted from their activities. They cheer the team as they enter the ice, check out the players, and look to see who is starting in which positions. The parents have experienced this routine many times and have become accustomed to this activity. When the game finally is about to begin, the parents put away the activities they have brought. Their full attention is focused on the ice. They stand for the national anthem, watch the puck drop, and then the game begins. The parents watch everywhere the puck goes and comment on the plays. "Hit 'em," "Good shot," "Come-on" can be heard from the stands. As an outsider, you may think the parents were coaching or playing the game themselves.

At the Bantam level, all parents can not simply be a spectator. There are parents sitting in the penalty boxes and another parent in the score box keeping time. These parents must be very careful what they say and do while performing these roles, as to not show favor to one team over the other. To limit expenses, these jobs are required so that the game may occur. Home teams must provide the individuals to perform these jobs, so parents must fill the role. Only when Midway is at an away arena can all parents simply be fans.

As the first period comes to an end, the parents cheer as the team heads to the locker room. They then turn their attention to other matters. Some parents get up to grab a snack from the concession stands. Others move to speak to a different parent and some take care of younger

siblings who have been running around the rink. When the game begins again, they quickly return to their seats and participate in the same manner as the first period.

By the time the third period begins, parents have become more involved in the game. Their comments have become more direct, “Go get ‘em,” “Check him,” “Come-on ref, make a call.” Their emotions rise, as the game comes to an end. Once the game is done, parents sit in the stands talking to one another. They watch the players’ traditional hand-shake with the other teams’ players and slowly begin to gather their items. Again, they gather in the waiting area. Here they engage in small talk with the other parents, talk about the game and arrange for rides home for their children. Many of the parents wait until their child is ready before they leave the arena.

Each hockey community has its own identity. The identity is formed throughout time and is known throughout hockey communities in the state. Win/ loss records, coaching quality, fan behavior, exceptional players, etc. define the individual community. Hockey communities are aware of each other’s reputations. Each community’s identity is constantly being redefined. This occurs when there are changes in coaches, exceptional seasons, and exceptional players.

The hockey community in Midway is a close knit group of individuals who have a common bond because of hockey. By the time their children reach Bantam and High School levels, most parents have participated in the Midway hockey community for over 9 years. They have developed connections with other members of the Midway community and other hockey communities in the state.

In Midway, the hockey community is composed of a diverse group of people. They come from different backgrounds and socioeconomic classes. Their prior experience with

hockey varies. Yet, hockey is the catalyst that brings them all together and forms a common bond among them. Jessica Wilson explains how she sees the Midway community.

I think it's a very diverse group of people, yet we all have the same interest of hockey. I've met so many different kinds of people that are involved in it, and the parents are different types of work backgrounds and educational backgrounds. And there's just so much diversity from that perspective. I think that people who are involved in it, there's a passion for it, and I think people that are on the outside don't necessarily always understand that (personal communication, Jan. 3, 2011).

Parents feel a common bond with one another, due to their commitment to the team and each other. They personally have chosen to be invested in hockey and participate in the common activities, just as their children have. Parents enjoy the connection they have with one another and rely on the common bond of hockey to bring them together. Once their child joins the team, the parents have joined a community that is there for them. The social capital that is developed between the parents grows stronger every year. Parents engage in rituals where they support not only their own child, but all the children on the team. Emily Clark explains, "I think watching other kids play and sitting by the parents knowing that they're gonna [sic] cheer for your kid and you're gonna [sic] cheer for their kid, I think really kind of builds a bond" (personal communication, March 30, 2011). The ritual that takes place in the stands brings the parents together and helps build stronger bonds in the hockey community. Throughout their years of sitting in stands supporting their child, they learn the shared roles and practices of the group and are integrated into the hockey society.

As suggested in previous chapters, the hockey community in Midway also requires commitment; not only from the players, but also from their parents. Hockey is a sport that requires significant financial assistance from families, willingness to travel throughout the state for games and tournaments, and willingness to bring children to practices and games at all times of the morning and night. These are requirements with which Midway hockey parents must live if they want their child to participate. When parents do not want to commit themselves to their child's hockey, it often results in the child dropping out. In the subsection below on Rites and Rituals of the Hockey Cult, the extreme importance of parental commitment will be further discussed at some length. Immediately following, I discuss more related aspects of being a member of the "Hockey Family." Finally, I discuss the 2010-2011 hockey season as a year of schism where the Midway parental community was challenged and ultimately pulled apart.

### **Rites & Rituals of the Youth Hockey Cult**

Throughout their child's hockey career, parents personally invest in hockey through their time, money, and the hockey "jobs." The activities that parents personally engage in bring the hockey community together, thus building social capital and integrating parents into the hockey community through rights and rituals. Throughout his research, Robert Putnam (2000) identified that social connections had value and resulted in social capital being produced. This social capital benefited the society. Through hockey participation, parents develop close social connections with the other members of the community, thus building social capital and developing a unique connection with each other. This close-knit group contains many of the same characteristics of cults.



Parents expect that their personal investment in hockey will give their child the best opportunity to succeed in the sport and allow them to become members of this elite group. Parents have different expectations of what will be gained from their child's participation in sports, from teaching their child lifelong skills, to having their child receive college scholarships. All of this is done as a way to fulfill their role as a "good" parent. The willingness to dedicate time, money, perform hockey jobs, and participate in group activities, allows the parents to join and remain a member of the hockey community. The more the parents integrate themselves into the rites and rituals of the community, the stronger the bonds with one another become. Without performing the above obligations, their child ultimately will drop out of hockey and the parents will not be part of the community anymore. The following are the rites and rituals of the hockey community.

**Get your kid to the games (and everything else).** Every parent will explain that hockey is a commitment. Not only does the child commit to playing, but the parents commit to all the responsibilities that come with having their child play. When asked "what does it mean to be a hockey parent?" Emily Clark explained the ways in which hockey parents must be committed to the sport.

It means you're going to commit. Really, if you're going to be a hockey parent, you have to make a conscious commitment to be willing to support your kid. Get your kid to games. I mean, I know there are hockey parents that probably don't make the commitment. But, I think that's what happens if parents aren't committed to supporting their kids' decision and getting them there. Their kids will not survive because it's too expensive and it's too demanding, you know. And kids will drop out because it means, being a hockey parent means, you're

willing to: step up, take your kids, take other people's kids, pick-up kids, take kids home; you know, take them to the games, pick them up from the games. (personal communication, March 30, 2011)

The parents' commitment is not only to their own child, but to all the members of the team and larger community, including the other parents. Parents feel a duty to not only commit to their own child, but to go out of their way to help all members of the team. Parents expect that they can rely on one another. "It's a commitment and responsibility, you have to be there, support other people" (Ben Campbell, personal communication, March 7, 2011). The expectation mutually exists between hockey parents that they can call upon other hockey parents and that they will be there to support one another. Throughout their many years of participation, parents have been integrated into the shared beliefs and emotions of the hockey community.

The commitment also extends beyond the rink. Because hockey requires so much time, parents need to balance all aspects of their life and help teach their child how to do the same, so everyone can follow-through on their commitment to the hockey team. Parents constantly have to balance the pressures to ensure their child is successful.

You're the one deciding what they do and don't do, even with school. And balancing school and sports, you have to make sure that their priorities are on education and then sports, that they are finding that balance between homework and sports, and managing that time. You sort of start out doing that for them and you hope as they start getting older that they start to figure some of those things out. (Emily Clark, personal communication, March 1, 2011)

The commitment radiates through all aspects of the player and parents' life. Once parents commit, they are willing to do almost anything to follow through, so that their child can have a

successful hockey season, which many parents believe will set them up for a successful life. This commitment is seen in the front stage by all other parents and coaches. The parents discuss with each other ways to ensure their child is successful, both in hockey and in the rest of life. Through these discussions, parents are developing shared beliefs that exist throughout the entire group. Without the commitment of the parents, the child will not be successful in the sport.

The time parents personally invest into hockey is substantial. One parent stated, “I find its 80% of my time is spent doing stuff for my kids’ hockey” (Rachel Garcia, personal communication, March 16, 2011). All parents interviewed discussed how much time hockey demanded from them. Bantam parents have to invest more of their time than the High School parents, because they must provide all the transportation for their child in addition to attending the games and other team activities. Mark Anderson explains the tremendous time commitment below.

At this level, Bantam level, 8<sup>th</sup> -9<sup>th</sup> graders, they’re skating 5 days every week, if not 6. Generally, Wednesday night is the night off for church. So, you’re running around to the practices, which isn’t too bad. The games are out of town. They take up a lot of your time and I don’t mind any of that... So, typically right now, you’ve got hockey from September to the end of February. I will use last year as an example. They have a month off and then I form a team for spring match league, which is 10 games in the city and a couple practices. It’s mostly just fun. So then, we take 10 trips into the city and then they have probably 5 -6 weeks off and there is 6 weeks of summer hockey, which we did in Midway last year. And, that leads right into a fall match league, which is another 10 games in the cities, and then while that is just finishing the regular season starts. That is what we did

last year, and I know some kids play year round. So, he had maybe 11 weeks off.

But, you give him a month without hockey and he's like, "I can't wait to skate again." (personal communication, Jan. 13, 2011)

As noted by Mark, having their child participate in hockey year-round has become the norm for many parents. Thus, parents must commit themselves to be available to transport their child and support them at games year-round. Rachael Garcia discussed how, although parents can take time away from hockey for their own activities, the guilt that is associated with it often prevents that from happening. She says,

I mean, they can 'cause [sic] any parent will pick up their kid for 'em [sic] and get 'em [sic] to whatever event needs to be done; but then they might feel, like guilty, for missing out on a game or a tournament. (personal communication, Jan. 26, 2011)

The expectation exists that parents must be at the events to support their children and fulfill their role as part of the community. This expectation comes from the integration into the shared beliefs, values and norms and shared emotions of the group.

This commitment goes as far as altering the lives of hockey parents and families. George Thomas explains, "Everything we do revolves around the hockey schedule, we don't go on vacations in the winter because of hockey... That pretty well is it (laughter), that's all we do" (Feb. 23, 2011). Parents are willing to give up everything else in their lives to have their child participate in the sport, as they feel it will teach their children the skills necessary to succeed in life. Many state that they do this so that their child can have fun playing and be successful. Yet, parents also have joined the community and been integrated into the community, developing

their own social capital through their experience. They personally are receiving a benefit from the time that they are putting into hockey.

Most importantly in this chapter's discussion is the close knit community of parents who are always willing to help one another out. Even though they are compelled to be at all events and transport their own child to everything, they are aware that is not always possible. Another member of the community is always willing to help. Maria Jones explains, "The nice thing is there are always parents, myself and others that are willing to give rides, because the parents can't get there" (personal communication, Jan. 19, 2011). The demand on parents' time can be overwhelming. Mary Lee observes,

I think everybody's just kind of keeping their head above water, you know.

Everybody running the kids and there's kind of a safety in numbers. Everybody's kind of in the same boat, you know. Tying skates and hauling kids and trying to keep everybody's schedules straight; and who's bringing your kid home from the game; cause you're like ,if you gotta go to your other kids' games, so that there is a sense of community within the teams and within the program. I think that's good. (personal communication, Jan. 13, 2011)

Because parents share a common experience at the rink, this helps them bond. The time they spend together and the activities they participate in perpetually helps restore the bonds among the community, and in turn, this brings them closer together and builds the social capital. Bantam parents, with children moving to the High School level next year, are more hesitant. They attribute this hesitation to the fact that their child will soon be more independent and will not rely on them as much. The parent will not spend the same amount of time dedicated to hockey as

they have in the past. The close community group that they have been part of for the past 9 years will disperse and become non-existent. They know the rites and rituals they have integrated into their lives will change. The group through which they have received their own social capital will be nonexistent as they know it. This is an unknown and many parents state that they will miss spending as much time at the arena.

**Be financially devoted.** Parents invest substantial amounts of money for their children to participate in hockey. Not only are there required fees paid to the association or High School, there are additional expenses for travel, transportation, admission into games, etc. The expense can be substantial enough that some families have to make financial sacrifices for their child to participate in hockey. Unfortunately, for some families, the cost is too much, and the children are never given the opportunity to play, or they have to drop out after only a few seasons.

At the Bantam level, the cost for the 2010-2011 season was approximately \$1,430.00. As a Midwest Youth Hockey player, additional fundraising is also required to cover other expenses. This fee covers ice time and coaching. Players and their families are responsible for their own transportation to and from practices and games, and for the costs of all equipment except for their jersey. At the Bantam level, tournaments are an additional expense. There are limited fundraising opportunities throughout the year that assist parents and players with the costs. Parents have a shared belief that their child will learn and grow from their experiences in hockey and therefore are willing to pay.

At the High School level, the cost for the 2010-2011 season was a \$175.00 participation fee at the beginning of the season. The Midway High School participation fee includes ice time, coaching, transportation, tournaments, and a uniform. The basic equipment, such as sticks and

pads, is the responsibility of the players and their families. Each player also participates in fundraising throughout the season to cover additional expenses. The Midway High School Hockey program also has an active booster club that helps support the team. The expense to participate at the High School is much less than at the Bantam level because the team is subsidized by the school district; therefore the entire expense of participation is not passed onto the player and their parents.

Each parent, when interviewed, discussed the financial demands of hockey. Parents were quick to break down the expense and explain how much they invest in hockey. Mark Anderson explains,

Well, I am sure there are a lot of things that could be more, but you probably spend, each year it goes up. So, at the Bantam level, you're probably going to spend \$2,000 on ice time for the regular season. You're going to spend \$500 on out of town tournaments, where you don't stay overnight. Over the summer, you're going to spend: \$550 for summer hockey, and about \$150 for spring league and \$150 or fall league. Now, you can spend absolutely as much money as you want. When you get into the hockey towns, their kids will have the best training money can buy all year round. Bigger program, more competition, more spots, better skaters. For years, hockey hasn't bothered me that much because the dance costs as much or more than the hockey. But you know what? We are just doing it to keep them from hanging out in the McDonalds parking lot, or over at Coborns in the evening. You just have to keep them busy and keep them in with the right crowd. (personal communication, Jan. 13, 2011)

Parents are certainly aware that activities cost money. Still, they are willing to invest in their child so that they will have every opportunity to be successful in life. Whether it is hockey, dance, skiing, or basketball, parents want their children to participate in activities. The shared belief in doing what is best for their child drives the parental willingness to continue to invest this amount of money in their children.

The concern is when an activity becomes so expensive that it limits who is able to participate. Many parents expressed this concern. Maria Jones explains,

It's financially crazy. From the time he started until now, I bet we are talking \$40,000. And that includes: ice time, skates, sticks (which are stupidly over priced), traveling, gas to and from hotels for tournaments, food, and snacks. It's huge. It's a lot of money. I think it's gotten where some kids that were good players and chose to drop out maybe one of 2 reasons. Financially, it's damn expensive; ice was \$2000 this year. Bantams is probably the most expensive ice because you do have more ice time, but it's huge. A lot of parents, it is really hard to be able to, it's a lot, even to go to hotels. I mean, you have other children; so, you're paying for their meals, and I see it being a strain for people. I don't want them to have to choose between that or your heat on in your house. The sacrifices, I know that sometimes the board or others have stepped up and helped other people financially with it. I like that. And, it's not vocalized, it's just some know about it and some don't. But, it's sad that it has to come to a point where "Oh my god, can I afford my child to play a sport?" (personal communication, Jan. 19, 2011)



The expense required to play limits the families who can participate in hockey. Jessica Wilson attributes money as the reason many have to stop participating.

I think that's why there's so much attrition with the sport. And, it's kind of unfortunate, in a way, it sort of feels 'elitist' not that you know, but, I don't mean it that way, I just mean that it's the 'have' and 'have not's. (personal communication, Jan. 3, 2011)

Parents must make a financial commitment each season to hockey, and for many families this means sacrificing in other areas. Financial devotion to hockey is required for their child's continued participation in the program. Because parents have to put so much money into hockey, they want to ensure their child receives the best opportunities from the experience. In turn, they become more involved in hockey and develop their own expectations of what the return of their investment should be.

The expense required for children to participate in hockey has continued to grow over time. As this has occurred, parents have become more vocal, in and out of the stands. Jack Johnson describes the situation,

The parental involvement in the game has evolved through the years. Now, it's that whole idea of 'I am paying, he's playing' and I don't personally concur with that. From my coaching days, I saw it, experienced it and don't agree with it. (personal communication, Dec. 23, 2010)

Parents expect when they invest as much money as they do in hockey that they personally have a voice. Ben Campbell explains,

You know when you're at the Bantams, I thought the parents were more loud. I thought they were more vocal, more into it, they paid a lot more money, they're at every practice, if your kids can't drive. At the High School level, we know that it is what is, the kid doesn't have to play, he didn't pay 'em [sic]. (personal communication, March 7, 2011)

Parents feel that they should receive something for their investment in the sport. What they expect as a return is different for each parent, yet there are some shared beliefs that are common to the group. Some feel it is playing time, others want their children to learn lifelong skills, yet others want a college scholarship. Despite the differences in the expectations of the return, parents' behavior has been altered. Parents feel that they are owed something, due to their financial contribution; and consequently their behavior, in and out of the stands, has changed.

**Do your hockey "job."** Throughout the season, parents are asked to volunteer for specific duties or hockey "jobs." There are different expectations of parents, at both the Bantam and High School levels. At the High School level, there is a booster club which parents are directly involved in. At the Bantam level, there is the job of a team "manager" who helps recruit parents for the positions required for the game to be played. On both teams, parents are asked to take on additional responsibility to help the team. This helps parents become integrated into the group and develop social capital.

At the Bantam level, parents are needed to keep book, supervise the penalty boxes, and run the clock at each game. One of the largest tasks at the Bantam level is the team manager. One parent describes,

I have been a team manager for the last 6 years. I just kind of got pulled into it one time, for a biweekly period; and then, the next year, it was, now after this 5 weeks and this team dissolves and we form our real teams. Then, I ended up the whole year. I think I have a pretty good relationship with them. I have to be a little bit more involved than some of the other parents, especially at this level. Now, you're scheduling scrimmages, you're moving practices to accommodate certain things, late practice here, and early practice there. So, I think I am pretty involved and I think I am pretty well respected for the job I do as a manager. People get a lot of information. It's my job to make sure they know what's going on, and to help the coaches (personal communication, Feb. 24, 2011).

Unfortunately, the pool of parents who are willing to volunteer for these additional responsibilities is becoming less and less each year. The manager continued,

You know, as a manager, I get a little bit tired of managing new parents. You asked 'em [sic] for volunteers and not getting anybody. So, I got to sit in the score booth, 'cause [sic] they don't want to. You know, they just want to come and watch.

Parents are less likely to volunteer to work a game, because they want to go and enjoy watching their child, justified by their financial commitment and a changing belief of the parents in their role while they are at hockey.

At the High School level, the booster club helps organize the parents. Although parents are not asked to work the games by running the clock, supervising the penalty boxes, or keeping book, there are many other jobs for which they are asked to volunteer. Parents may be asked to

volunteer as the booster club chair, to put together a team program, organize team meals and provide the food, and to bring snacks for the team to eat between periods.

Each parent is asked to contribute more of their own time and money to support the team. They volunteer for these roles because it is part of their commitment as a parent. These rites and rituals are all a part of the experience in which parents must participate and in which they have been integrated into doing throughout their years in hockey. They accept these roles because they are unstated expectations of the community. Although parents are in control of which role they choose, the expectation is that parents will volunteer for one role or another. Unfortunately, it is becoming more and more difficult each year to recruit parents to do these hockey “jobs.”

**Observe proper rink behavior (or not).** Midway parents understand what is expected of them, in terms of rink behavior as discussed in chapter 4. Even though they are aware of these expectations and have attended meeting and training sessions for multiple years on appropriate behavior, at times, parents do not act in an appropriate manner. When this occurs, the community as a whole responds to the inappropriate actions. In general, the parents stick together and are willing to step in and diffuse a negative situation. Or, if inappropriate behavior occurs, they are quick to forgive the community member who engaged in the behavior.

As previously described, one situation that occurred during the High School season was when Midway was playing a rival team. A student carrying the Midway school flag continued to run back and forth in front of all the stands, including the rival team’s stands. This continued for some time. A parent witnessing this behavior saw a younger man step in front of the student with the flag and take the flag. The parent felt that this was inappropriate and went down to confront this younger gentleman. Upon doing so, he pushed the younger gentleman and engaged

in an argument. Security quickly was called, and the father was removed from the arena. It later became apparent that the gentleman he had pushed was the Athletic Director for the rival team. The student had been warned that if he continued to run the flag in front of the rival team's stands, it would be taken away. The parent ended up being banned from the arena for all of the remaining High School games.

Parents quickly came to the father's support. Although they admitted his behavior was inappropriate and deserved consequences, at the same time, they were quick to forgive the father and were there to support him through the difficult time. The sense of duty from the group was stronger than the actions of the individual. Coach Martin, the Midway Athletic Director explains,

I thought the parents handled it well and some people came to try to support, which I don't think is uncommon. 'Cause [sic] it wasn't something that was real common for that parent either. He's usually, he's pretty soft spoken. And they were just kind of coming to his defense like I would expect. Like friends do for each other, but, no, I would say the parents are real passive about it, because of that fact. One, you know, they think the parent is an upstanding person and want to support him. On the same token, I think they know that it was something that was not a good deal (personal communication, March 18, 2011).

The bonds formed within the community allow for members to forgive the inappropriate behavior and move forward with support for the member. The strong social ties, shared beliefs, values, and norms outweigh an incident of inappropriate behavior.

The behavior exhibited in the stands is mostly positive. Yet, when negative behavior occurs, parents are quick to dismiss the behavior of other parents from their team.

They're mostly positive, mostly energetic and they like to get involved in the game, they get into the game, most of 'em [sic]. Some educated, some not so educated, some louder than others (laughter). But the best part is, the ones that are loud, they don't mean any harm by it, and they know, everybody knows, there's a couple guys they get a little wound up, but we all know it's just- that's the way they are, you know? (Ben Campbell, personal communication, Dec. 22, 2010)

There seems to be a willingness of the hockey community to allow fellow parents to behave in this manner. They tolerate this behavior and quickly dismiss it as the characteristic of the other parent. This comes from the integration into the hockey community and also the social capital that is built. Not all parents interviewed allow the behavior to continue without stepping in. George Thomas explains how he at times steps in to stop inappropriate behavior by other parents on his team.

To an extent, if they're excited about something, I'll let them rant on for a little while. And, if they get excessive, then I'll say—tell them to shut-up. That's usually at the refs again, the refs or other parents in the stands. And, I'll usually tell them to shut-up. You know, and there are issues, I can handle a few words here and there, but.... (personal communication, Feb. 23, 2011)

As a whole, the community tolerates misbehavior to some extent. They are there to support one another; and, because of the bonds they have formed, they are quick to dismiss the misbehavior and stand up for the member of the community who is misbehaving.

The marked willingness of the group to allow this behavior which contradicts the ideals set forth by the Hockey Association, suggests that the hockey family is more than a group of supportive parents and athletes. The group protects its other members and supports one another despite the actor's behavior and knowing that this behavior is inappropriate. The ritualistic behavior parents display in the stands of cheering, speaking nicely, supporting both teams, etc. is being overshadowed by a few individuals who are going against the norm by going off script and behaving inappropriately. Parents are quick to identify the divergence from the accepted ritual, but also support the offending parent because of group membership.

**Help each other out.** Hockey parents rely on one another throughout the season. Realistically, parents are not able to be at every game or practice, and some may not be available to transport their child at all times. Although parents try their best to meet these demands, at times they need to turn to other members of the hockey community for help. "What's nice is that I can just tell my son to 'Get a ride' and he's got a ride home from the rink" (Rachel Garcia, personal communication, Jan. 26, 2011). The willingness to transport other children to and from the rink and help one another permeates through the community. This willingness to help is strengthened every year through the friendships of the parents and the community functioning like a family.

The willingness to help each other extends beyond the arena and into the larger community. George Thomas reflected on a time when he was called by another hockey dad to

help remove a snowmobile from the lake. George, along with many other hockey dads, came to help him get it out. The parents willingly came to his assistance and as George stated, “The parents really will go out of their way, it’s friendship” (personal communication, Feb. 23, 2011). The connections made in the hockey arena extend into community life. The bonds and social capital that is created is important for parents.

**Participate in social gatherings.** The camaraderie, which starts in the hockey arena, extends into the parents’ social lives. Whether the social gathering is a party, snowmobiling, fishing, or hunting, parents and players socialize outside the rink. George Thomas explains,

Yeah, because teammates’ parents are my friends. You know, most of our group has been together since Squirt. So, that’s eight years that we (have) been all playing together, so we’ll do stuff out of hockey a lot. We go fishing, snowmobiling, whatever we can do to get away for an afternoon. (personal communication, Feb. 23, 2011)

The social aspect is important for parents. They enjoy spending time outside the rink together and look for opportunities when they can spend time together. This in turn builds their social ties and develops social capital.

Parents state that the activities outside of the arena are based on similar interests. Matthew White explains, “I think a lot of us have the same interests. I know a lot of the guys have the same interests” (personal communication, Feb. 24, 2011). The hockey arena is a venue where parents connect through hockey, and those social connections extend into their personal lives. Cliques are formed which strengthen the bond between parents. Their bond extends



beyond the walls of hockey and, while their child is enrolled in the association, parents have a community they can rely on.

Throughout the years, the parents have also organized and engaged in parties and other social activities with the other parents. George Thomas reflects, “We’ll have parties and what not and everyone will come. I don’t know, I think they all get along well, all the parents get along most of the time” (personal communication, Feb. 23, 2011). Parents see the parties as a good opportunity to get together outside of hockey. Yet, over the years, the participation has dwindled. Maria Jones explains,

We have a New Years Eve party. We have done it for years. It is at one of our family’s homes that has a rink in their yard. It used to be heavily attended. It has dropped off in the past...But they still offer it. (personal communication, Jan. 19, 2011)

As their children get older, parents’ social lives seem to be changing, especially as parents prepare for their child to enter high school hockey. Parents are not as compelled to spend time together outside of hockey unless it is of interest to them. The rites and rituals of the group continue to be clearly defined inside the hockey arena. Yet, as their children begin to transition from Bantam to High School, outside the arena, it begins to differ.

This change in the social behavior is important because, although the social capital is strong while their child and the parents are part of the hockey community, the social capital begins to decrease as parents become less involved. Parents seem to understand that at the Bantam level, they will be losing their social ties to this group of people. The connections that once kept them together will soon be gone. The ritualistic activities of sitting in the stands,

paying the fees, wearing their association gear, and cheering on their team will soon be gone.

Although parents are still actively involved in the group, they know it is coming to an end. Their needs that have been met by participation in the sports cult will not be met anymore. At the Bantam level, parents begin to transition to other activities and interests that fulfill these needs.

### **The Hockey Family as a Parenting Cult**

Most parents join the hockey community when they enroll their child in Mini-Mites at age 5. They spend tremendous amounts of time together and form bonds with the other members of the community. The benefits that they receive from this community extend beyond the hockey arena. Close friendships are made, and parents rely on one another for assistance and engage in group activities outside of hockey. Some parents even describe the hockey community as an extended family. In this section, I will analyze these relationships and the correlation between family and benign cult behavior. As noted earlier, Ragas & Bueno (2002) report that followers in benign cults receive a sense of satisfaction, accomplishment, belonging, and enlightenment from their membership. They fill the emotional wants and needs of the followers and are never destructive or harm their members physically or mentally. We will next examine how the hockey family fills these needs for the parents.

**Join the community.** Joining the Midway hockey community is not an easy choice for all parents interviewed. Parents recognize, to some extent, the financial and time commitments in which they will engage before they enroll their child in hockey. Many parents try to engage their child in another sport so they do not have to have their child play hockey.

He has been in every sport there was. He asked us and we talked about sports and he played sports, he plays some for a long time, he played some for a very short

time. He asked to play hockey and I said “Well, let’s go through all the other sports before we get to hockey, so we don’t make that big investment and then you want to quit.” And so, we went through all the sports and the last one was down to hockey we said “Okay that’s fine.” It was his passion, so that’s that.

(Matthew White, personal communication, Jan. 3, 2011)

Multiple parents had their child try other sports before enrolling in hockey. The time commitment and financial investment were the two reasons why parents were hesitant to let a player join. Yet, there are other parents who always wanted their children to participate in hockey. Most of these individuals came from a hockey background and always imagined their children playing hockey.

Parent’s who were not motivated to have their child play hockey, eventually take on the roles and responsibilities of a hockey parent. Ultimately, they enjoy the hockey experience, participate fully and feel part of the community. Mark Anderson explains how he came to be a hockey parent.

It’s funny, at an early age, and by that I mean, 2 ½ to 4 he was in the kitchen with a round magnet and a couple of spatulas just hitting around constantly, and pretty soon we started playing with him back and forth. That was our version of whatever you want to call the game. And, he hadn’t even seen kids out skating yet. We took him out to the lake a few times to skate. My wife and I are only marginal skaters at best, and one day a dad came down with his boy and he had a hockey helmet and a stick and a puck, “I want to do that” is all we heard. And so, with my wife being a nurse, she questioned a lot of her patients as to whether we

should let him. We heard the demands on family time, the cost and we ourselves didn't really care that much for hockey. So, we decided to let him do it the first year, kind of hoping he would try it and not like it, and now its 9 years later and he's still doing it. We spent about the first 3-4 years waiting for him to quit, realized he wasn't going to. And in the last few years, you get into the game, you learn how hard they work to get where they are at by the time they're in High School. Understand the game. It's kind of my passion now (Feb. 24, 2011).

The longer the parent is part of hockey, the stronger bonds they develop with the community. The more years they are engaged in hockey, the closer parents become with their fellow parents and the social capital becomes stronger. This occurs because of the high commitment each parent must provide to the community.

Parents explain that they enjoy the bonds they develop with the other parents. They state this as a benefit of having their child participate in hockey. Jessica Wilson explains,

I think that you build a lot of good friendships through your kid's sports. I know moving up here to Midway, we only know hockey parents. We haven't really met any other people. We knew one other family that lived here, before we moved down here and the rest of the people that we know here in Midway are probably hockey parents. (personal communication, Jan. 3, 2011)

It is not uncommon for parents to state that most of their friends are hockey related. Although the friendship extends beyond hockey, many parents rely on their child's sport to meet other people. The hockey arena is a place where parents belong and social capital is created.

**Become part of the family.** The relationships parents and players develop with the other members of the hockey community is often referred to as a hockey family. Parents and coaches state that the way they relate to other members of the hockey community is different than the relationships formed in other sports. Linda White shared what her son has posted on Facebook, “Hockey is different from any other sport, we are family” (personal communication, Feb. 24, 2011). The reoccurring theme of “family” continued through many of the interviews. In my personal experience as a coach and teacher, I find that this “family” relationship is not present in all sports. It seems to occur when parents invest years into an association with the same group of individuals. The parents on the Bantam team were more likely to consider themselves a family than the High School team. It seems the shared connections begin to break down when there is not as much responsibility on parents and the time they spend together decreases. Sports with a similar level of parental commitment are dance, figure skating, gymnastics, little league baseball, and elite soccer clubs. All of these activities require parents to enroll their child at a young age, financially contribute to the sport and personally invest much of their own time and resources.

Many attribute the community that develops as feeling like a family because of the amount of time spent together and the way they are able to relate to one another.

I will tell you what the hockey family is unlike. I know there is a lot of sports and I have played a lot, my brothers have played a lot, my kids have played a quite a few, but there is no sport like hockey because of the time and money invested that brings families together. Now, these families spend a ton of time together off-season. It’s kind of a different culture. They don’t exclude other families; but, if you ask a hockey family for directions, they will tell you where it is from the rink in any city in the state. I mean that’s just how we relate to each other. “You know

where the rink is in Central? You go down...” and that’s how we say it. It’s kind of funny in that way. I don’t think basketball families tell you where it is from the basketball court. (Coach Smith, personal communication, March 22, 2011)

The hockey community feels it is different than other sports communities. Parents are required to be an active part of their child’s participation from a very young age. Without their support, the child will not be able to continue to play hockey. Emily Clark describes the other parents as “second moms/dads to her son” (personal communication, March 30, 2011). She sees them as a “circle of resources” upon whom she can rely. The willingness from all parents in this study to provide a family type relationship is present in the Midway hockey community. Parents at the Bantam level speak of this relationship more than at the High School level. This may be because, as players move to High School, the involvement from their families decreases.

The fact that parents feel close enough to other members of the hockey community to call them family is a shift from a few decades ago. Players whose families are not invested socially and financially do not fit in and usually drop out of the program. The hockey cult requires active participation. The increase of time and money which parents invest in hockey has resulted in a change in relationships. The community bonds appear to be stronger, with more social capital developed.

Well, the good part of the hockey community is, I mean, there’s parents there you see all the time; and they feel like, feel like your family, ‘cause you’re, you’ve got a select group of parents that spend so much time together... I guess the hockey community, to me, was for a long time, was just a safe zone (Mark Anderson, personal communication, Feb. 24, 2011).

Whether hockey is a safe zone for parents or a place to make friends, the social capital which develops is strong. The relationships they develop provide satisfaction for emotional wants and needs and the desire to belong. These are all requirements of benign cults. Parents and players feel the connection to each other and feel that the bonds which they develop are as close as family bonds.

**Develop friendships.** Parents value the friendships that are made through hockey. Many parents discuss, in their interviews, how they would not have this group of friends if it wasn't for hockey. "Without a doubt, I wouldn't know most of these people without hockey" (George Thomas, personal communication, Feb. 23, 2011).

We've gained a lot of friendships within the community, with people that we wouldn't of (sic) known if it wasn't for hockey" (Mary Lee, personal communication, March 24, 2011). Linda and Matthew White explain, "I would say probably 90% of our friends are sports related...because we have so much in common and the kids are together, and you kind of like to know what your kids are doing when they are at someone's house. (personal communication, Feb. 24, 2011)

The social capital created in the hockey arena extends to other areas of the community and is different from the social capital previously studied. The parental social connections are through their children's activities and not because of their own personal interests. Yet, this does not take away from the social capital that is being created. Although the place and organizations are different than two decades ago, social capital is being created.

The connections parents make in the hockey arena are an important part of social capital. This leads to the following questions: What happens when parents are not members of the hockey community, and do the benefits of the social connection remain after the player's age out of the program? A few parents addressed these in their interviews.

Yes, I would very much miss the social aspect of it, because I can go there and that's my safe haven. I know literally everyone there. My wife just shows up for games and she knows the other mothers, right, and whatever the group of parents are that year, and I just know everybody. I would miss the social aspect; I would miss the game of hockey. I probably would still go watch hockey again until that faded off, but hopefully, he would get into some other sport that I could concentrate on (Mark Anderson, personal communication, Feb. 24, 2011).

The thought of having hockey come to an end is something that disturbs many parents. The main reason for this is because they will miss the experience and the social connections. They will miss out on the benefits they personally receive from their participation in the group. They will no longer have their emotional wants and needs met by the group; their sense of belonging will wane, and their sense of satisfaction and accomplishment will have to come from other activities. Ben Campbell explains,

Anybody at this level has been doing it for the last ten years and they've become a lot of friends; and they're weird when they don't play and you don't have the rink. It's gonna [sic] be weird next year when my kid can drive. I won't have to go to the rink; I'll really be out of the loop. (personal communication, March 7, 2011)



Parents look forward to the friendships that they make and the feeling of being part of a community. The social capital developed through their child's participation in hockey is beneficial to the community as a whole.

**Perhaps get shunned.** Parents want to feel that they are a part of the hockey community. They look forward to the bonds they will form with other members of the team. When parents feel that they are not being included in the group, bonds are broken and feelings are hurt. Linda White explains a time when they were at an away tournament. A group of "older parents" were out to dinner and had a large table with many open spots. The "newbie's" entered the restaurant and were told it was a 45 minute wait. As they stood around and waited, the other group of parents noticed them, yet did not invite them over to the table to join them. She stated that she felt like this was "a little on the snotty side" (personal communication, Feb. 24, 2011). She went on to explain that since she moved her son up to the High School team it was "not so feel-goody, goody anymore. It's not the close knit (group)." She missed the bonds she had with the Bantam parents with whom she had spent years. The shunning that occurs when members of the group are not welcome leaves a strong impression on individuals. When a parent is not welcome, they feel like an outsider, and the benefits they receive from hockey are not being fulfilled. The parents want to do whatever is necessary to become part of the group again. Unfortunately, sometimes the bonds never are restored.

Hockey is set-up, at the youth level, for parents to form close knit bonds with other members of the team. Parents attend many practices, games, and tournaments and spend considerable time with one another.

It gets a lot more intense and they expect so much more than 25 years ago. Too much parent involvement, but you can't help but be involved if you're the one driving him to everything and dumping the money into it. But, the emotions have gotten so high, you want your kid to do well, but I think you want your kid to have fun too. I think that is really missed. I don't remember grandma and grandpa and aunt and uncle coming to all of my games. On occasion they would come, but its family and friends. I don't think the spectators were that involved before and came as often as now. Even for the younger kids, all the way up to varsity level (Maria Jones, personal communication, Jan. 19, 2011).

The commitment from the entire family is required at the Bantam level. As they transition to the High School team, this commitment decreases because the school provides transportation, subsidizes the expense, and attendance at practices is not expected/required/mandatory. The social capital developed at the youth level is much stronger than the social capital at the High School level.

**Leave the cult.** Parents are aware that there comes a time when their child will not participate in hockey and do not look forward to that day. Parents' participation and dedication to hockey too will come to an end. Unfortunately, when this happens, their relationships change with the other members of the hockey community.

There is one that dropped out, and I see the mom on occasion. And I will see the mom briefly and say, "How is it going?" And she will say, "Good." I still talk and whatever, not that I would have called her anyway, but still continue talking in passing. Everyone that I talk to (who has quit) seem to be glad to be out of it,

whether it is financial reasons or just the time commitment or results or free time.

They are not banned or exiled because they dropped out, by any means. For obvious reasons, they don't have that same close framework that comes with the experience. It is positive or negative; but it is definitely different (Maria Jones, personal communication, Jan. 19, 2011).

The social relationships that revolved around hockey dissolve and parents must find something else to provide their social experience and fill their emotional needs. Mark Anderson explains his feeling about if his son were to quit hockey.

I'd miss it. Like one other day, we were talking about it, I'd miss it, but, you know what? I could find something else to do. So, there was about four of our dads standing there and we kinda (sic) said the same thing. You know, tell your kid, 'Do it for you, don't do it for me.' (personal communication, Feb. 24, 2011)

The social capital that exists in the hockey arena is fragile, and many relationships revolve solely around the hockey experience. When this is taken away, parents must engage in a new social experience, so that they may stay connected to society and develop the bonds that they desire with other parents.

### **The 2010-2011 Season of Sacrilege and Schism**

The 2010-2011 hockey season was a unique situation for both the Bantam and High School teams. This was the first time in Midway history that Bantam players as a whole were asked to try out for the High School team. This presented a unique situation for the parents that ultimately resulted in many unfulfilled expectations, hurt feelings, and destruction of the "cult."

After years together moving from Squirt B to Squirt A, PeeWee B to PeeWee A, and Bantam B to finally Bantam A, which would be the pinnacle of their years in hockey, parents developed close bonds and became a tight knit group. For years, they relied on each other, shared common experiences, and everyone got along well with one another. They felt that the bond they shared was special. Over time, the parents at the Bantam level were labeled “the cult.” Maria Jones explains how that name was given to the group by a coach years ago. The coach had never seen a group of parents get along so well and spend so much time together. In turn, because of their behavior and the closeness of the group, this group of Bantam parents was often referred to as “the cult” or sometimes “the rat pack.”

During the 2010-2011 school year, there had been transition in the group. Players were given the opportunity to try out for the high school team. At first, parents were very skeptical and wanted to have the exceptional Bantam season they had originally envisioned. They knew having some of the cult’s player’s move to the high school team would ruin this possibility. One parent explained the position the parents were put in when faced with this decision.

This would have been our seventh best season. We had a lot of second year returns and didn’t have that many going up. There was a mandatory meeting and Coach Williams brings us in there with Coach Taylor. They said they needed some players on the varsity team. They are short and they don’t have enough for a JV team and they can’t promise to play. A lot what he said in that meeting was untrue. I have had these hockey boys at my house when my daughter graduated, I have known about them for 4 years, he lied to all the parents. He said he needs some coming up, which would break apart our team, which is fine. You as a parent make that choice, is your child ready to do that or not? If you ask kids in

college now or High School what was your favorite year of hockey? They are going to say Bantam. That is the most fun year before you get into the next level.

And there was a lot of crap going around. And Coach Williams going to school and pressuring them saying, 'why would you stick with your friends, that's a dumb idea.' There was so much crap and stress on these kids that it was very icky... So now you as head of whatever can't get your own team, you're going to take from our team, which hurt us at the Bantam level and hurt them at the JV level. But, every parent let their child decide, or as a family chose what to do. From the get go, I asked my son what would you like to do? Would you want to move up? And he said right from the start, 'Stay.' I was shocked because he hangs with most of the older ones, but he stayed with the group and we have a great team, but it could have been a really solid team. But, based on the need for more players, there was a big change. (Maria Jones, personal communication, Jan 19, 2011)

Discussions took place, meetings were held and ultimately each family had to choose for themselves how they were going to proceed. Everyone knew there was going to be a schism with "the cult" dividing into two sects. Coach Smith was aware that there was animosity against the High School program from both the players and their parents. He described the situation that he felt perpetuated this animosity.

Originally, I think that primarily stemmed from what I called the top-tier of kids got together and made a little pact with each other that they're all going to stay and play their Bantam year. Well, I think that what broke that down was one of

the top prospects for the High School, his stepdad got very sick and was sick coming into the season, so, the financial burden between Bantam and High School Hockey was a no-brainer. I told him, I said you need to go play High School Hockey and ease the burden on your family. I think that kind of opened the floodgates and then the rest of the kids looked at him, not knowing his situation, going, well, if you're going, I'm going to go. And, left behind were some of the kids that were probably really counting on having these other boys around.

(Coach Smith, personal communication, March 22, 2011)

The decision was not easy for any of the members and ultimately the group ended up separating. Five Bantam players, whose parents were members of "the cult," moved up to the High School level. Parents who remained with the Bantam program considered the High School parents to be sacrilegious, because they broke the "cult" rules, traditions, and expectations. This caused the group to reevaluate what they felt they had always known about the team and to move outside their comfort zone.

The turmoil this decision caused shaped the 2010-2011 Bantam and High School season for both the parents and the players. Maria Jones explains, "Like 'the cult' ...It has been the same group... The little cliquey group, the rat pack is always together" (personal communication, Jan. 16, 2011). When looking at the group itself, many of the same characteristics of a religious cult are evident: a small informal group lacking definite authority structure; somewhat spontaneous in its development; transitory, mystical, and individually orientated; and deriving its inspiration from outside the predominant culture. (Richardson, 1993, p.349)

The group formed within the hockey arena fits the definition and meets the requirements of a cult. The parent group is a small group that does not have a specific authority structure, yet there are many strong parents that keep the group together. This was true of the Bantam parents in that it was spontaneously formed when the children were young, and the parents formed close ties with each other from this spontaneous group. The group is transitory in that there is a finite time the parents will be a member of the organization. In hockey, parents usually join the group when their child enrolls at age 5 or 6 and cease when the youth teams are disbanded when their children enter High School Hockey at 14 or 15. Players who move to higher levels are incorporated with athletes who have belonged to rival groups, thus evolving into new hockey communities. This leaves nine to ten years for the group to join together before it naturally dissolves. Throughout this time, parents are integrated into the community and rely on one another. Parents also may have their own individual agendas that they bring into the group. These agendas are focused on their children, yet they work together to fulfill the parents' individual outcomes. The inspiration that the parents bring with them is outside the predominant culture in that they are willing to do just about anything to have their child be successful in hockey. As the demand from the community members grows, so does the social strength of the community. This was very true for the Bantam group of parents.

This cultic behavior explains why parents are willing to invest excessive time and money into their child's hockey. Parents have become so entangled in the groups social needs that they will do anything to ensure that they stay a part of the group. This devoted behavior is true for the Midway Bantam hockey team. For this reason, the 2010-2011 hockey season was a year of schism and sacrilege. Parents chose to leave "the cult" and move their child to the high school team, leaving behind many of the other cult members.

The core group of Bantam parents was torn apart. Each parent or set of parents decided whether to stay as part of “the cult” and remain with the parents with whom they had grown close or move onto the High School team. Both sets of parents justified their decisions. One parent stated about the parents they left at the Bantam level, “I think they look at it now that they’re kind of glad that we paved the path. Some of our kids, that are already there, can kind of lead the other ones and help with that transition” (personal communication, Feb. 24, 2011). Yet, another parent remarked,

The kids that moved up, I guess weren’t real good friends with the majority.

They were friends with them, but not very good friends. You know, the main group is still together, I think. I think the season would have gone better with those kids. (personal communication, Jan. 19, 2011)

The decision to move up was not easy for the players or parents. The parents who chose to move up struggled because they knew they were disappointing the group and would be walking away from their commitment to the group. The ones that chose to stay at the Bantam level, felt abandoned by the other parents. There was a schism in their cult. Both groups of parents struggled with the reality that they no longer were one group as they were supposed to be for the Bantam year. This resulted in parents feeling abandoned and socially rejecting the members of the opposite team. Although parents knew that their parental group would naturally dissolve the following year when their children entered high school, they did not want it to happen earlier than planned. Only through time will we be able to see if the parents are able to repair their relationships when all their children will be joined together again on the High School team.



## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **Conclusions and Implications for Further Research**

I was fortunate to be given the opportunity to engage in exploratory research on hockey parents. Throughout the study, it was apparent that this group of parents wants the best for their children. Each of these parents will do anything in their power to ensure that their child has the best opportunities in life. Ultimately, producing a child that is successful is a central desire of parents. By enrolling their child in hockey, parents not only provide an atmosphere for their child to grow, but also engage in a community themselves. The daily requirements demanded of sports parents have changed over the past generation. Parents are required to become an active part of the hockey community, and through their participation, they gain a network on which they can rely. This research began to look at these changes and what role youth sports are playing in the parents' lives. Much more study on this topic needs to be done to fully understand the changes in parents' relationships and behavior.

### **Conclusions**

#### **Parents Staging Hockey as Character Development**

American parents are under tremendous pressure to ensure that they are raising successful children. They are willing to do anything possible to give their child opportunities to teach them the skills needed in life. Parents feel that sports participation is an avenue which stresses the skills that they want to teach their children. By enrolling their child in hockey, parents are doing what they believe is necessary to fulfill their duties of good parenting.

Parents use hockey as a stage where the child learns life skills necessary for his future. To successfully achieve this, parents are expected to act in a specified way while they are present

at their children's sporting events. They take on many dramaturgical roles throughout the season to ensure that their child learns character development lessons.

Parents see practice as the rehearsal and the game as the performance. At the performance, parents can truly appreciate their hard work throughout the season. They use the rehearsals, games, and performances to teach their child about future success/loss, watch them grow, and bond with their child. The way their child plays his part on the hockey stage becomes a sign of success for the parents.

Through hockey, parents script the life lessons they want their child to learn to be successful adults. Hockey provides a framework through which they are able to work with their child and have their child practice and perform the lessons needed to be successful in life. Parents do this through their support, teaching appropriate behavior, giving their child space to learn on their own, protecting their child, and controlling their own behavior. Ensuring their child learns each of these lessons requires parents to play the role of a "good" American parent. Many of the roles the parents play are on the front stage where other parents can see their interactions. However, some actions take place in the backstage and sometimes contradict the front stage role which other people can see.

"Good" parents provide constant protection, supervision, guidance, emotional support, intellectual stimulation, and continual monitoring for their child. To fully participate, parents must invest themselves into their child's sport. Hockey becomes a major commitment of both time and money for the parents. Parents are willing to do this to ensure that their child grows up to be a successful adult. This is a shift in behavior from past generations. Parents are more involved in youth sports than ever before and this has changed the youth sports culture.

Throughout the hockey experience, the parent must allow their child to learn the hard lessons, without stepping in to rescue the child from every difficulty. The coach and parent must work together to co-direct the life lessons they want the players to learn. At the Bantam and High School levels, the coach often does most of the teaching in the front stage and the parents continue the lessons in the backstage. Working together, parents and coaches are able to help each player grow. They work cooperatively to co-direct the lessons of teamwork, hard work, sportsmanship, discipline, structure, and responsibility. By working together, they direct the child to learn these life skills through their experience in hockey. Parents rely on the coaches to teach these lessons in the front stage and parent's follow-up on these lessons in the backstage.

Unfortunately, when things do not go as the parents have scripted, they lose their dramaturgical focus. This is seen when parents go off-script and behave inappropriately. Throughout parents' involvement in their child's sports, they identify complaints and fears that cause them to behave inappropriately. Although parents enroll their child in sports to ensure that they are teaching them all the necessary skills to be productive adults, at times parents step out of their front stage role of "good" parent and display behavior that is in opposition to their ultimate goal. By expressing their complaints and fears, parents are teaching their child skills contrary their expected role as "good" parents

This study analyzes hockey parent's behavior through a dramaturgical lens. An extended case is made throughout the dissertation that using a dramaturgical lens to analyze the data leads to a new way of studying sports parents. Using the dramaturgical lens allows researchers to try to figure out how sports parents act and why they act in this manner. At this time, no research on sports parents has been analyzed in this way. This study expands the research on sports parents by looking at their behavior through their dramaturgical interactions.

## **Adult Backstage Reflections on Each Others' Roles**

Parents and coaches work together to co-direct the life lessons they want the athletes to take away from their sports participation. In doing so, coaches have specific expectations of the parents, and parents have specific expectations of the coaches. Although parents and coaches interact on the front stage, they rarely discuss the expectations they have for each other. These expectations are backstage reflections and are not generally discussed on the front stage.

These backstage reflections define the way coaches expect parents to interact during their child's hockey season. As players progress from mini-mites to Bantam, the role the parents play changes. The coaches' expectations of parents are redefined as players grow and develop throughout their years in hockey. Coaches describe that they expect parents to support their child, be positive, be realistic, support the coach, and communicate as parents.

In the sports arena, parents have to act both in the front and backstage. Most of their interaction teaching their child occurs in the backstage. The coach does most of the teaching in the front stage. At times, it is difficult for parents to take a back seat role in their child's development and watch as another adult helps their child grow. This can be especially difficult for parents who are used to actively being involved in all aspects of their child's life. Parents' expectations of the coach throughout the season are to improve their child's hockey skills, be in control and coach, communicate with the athletes, communicate early with parents, and play their child.

Analyzing the coach's expectations of the parents and the parent's expectations of the coaches expands the literature, because it allows us to look at what expectations each group has of each other and why they have those expectations. This type of analysis of sports parents and

coaches has not been studied in past literature. This research provides a systematic approach to analyzing coaches' expectations for parents and parents' expectations for coaches that allows for a greater insight into their expectations.

### **Dynamics of the “Hockey Family”**

Youth sports in the 21<sup>st</sup> century require much greater participation from parents. The level of commitment required of hockey parents approximates the level of commitment required by sects and cults. Through this participation, parents develop close social bonds with the other members of the hockey community. They also receive cult-like rewards from their membership such as a sense of satisfaction, accomplishment, and belonging by being active members of the group.

The connections made in the hockey arena become very important to the parents. Their membership begins when they enroll their child in hockey and peaks at the Bantam level. The willingness to participate in the rites and rituals to remain a part of the group is apparent from getting their kids to the game (and everything else), being financially devoted, doing their hockey “job,” observing proper rink behavior (or not), helping each other out, and participating in social gatherings. The parents willingly participate, and their behavior appears cultic. It fills a social void for the parents. Upon the culmination of the Bantam year, the cult-like rewards rapidly fade away.

Participating in youth hockey provides a social network for parents. These social connections aid the formation of social capital within the community. Through the social connections parents make through their membership in the “Hockey Family,” considerable social capital is created. Previous generations relied on social groups such as bowling clubs, church

groups, or Rotary clubs to build adult social capital in their community. Unfortunately, these groups are diminishing and minimal social capital is being created.

Parents have changed their focus from activities for their own enjoyment to focusing on their child's activities. Through their commitment to youth hockey, they spend much of their free time at the ice arena with their child's teammates and families. Fortunately, the connections that they make through these organizations generate social capital and develop a unique connection among its members. This close-knit group contains many of the same characteristics of cults.

Hockey parents can be seen as a benign cult. The behaviors of this group mimic the actions of cults. In turn, this allows researchers to look at hockey through a different lens than has been previously discussed in the literature. By analyzing the hockey family and looking at the way it is developed, there is a structure and sequence as to how these groups are formed. From joining the community to becoming part of the family, developing friendships, perhaps getting shunned, and leaving the cult, cultic rites and rituals can be seen in the groups interactions. By analyzing the data using religious and cult terminology, the dynamics of the group is seen in a much different way than has been previously discussed in the literature.

The 2010-2011 hockey season in Midway was a year of schism because this group of parents and players was forced to split when it wasn't expected. Normally they would have been allowed to have the great bantam year to which they had been looking forward for years. Parents saw the Bantam year as the culmination of all their years in the association. This was the opportunity for the best players to be together at the peak of their performance. But they did not get that opportunity. Instead, the group was torn apart and some players moved up to the high

school program. The group of Bantam parents who had formed a benign cult was torn apart before its expected demise. They would never experience the outcome of their hard work as a group.

## **Implications**

The implications arising from this research revolve around a new understanding of parents' participation in their children's athletics. Since most Athletic Directors, coaches, and youth sports organizers grew up in past generations, many do not understand the change in parental behavior. As shown in this study, this change occurs as each hockey group develops norms for their team. These norms set expectations for the parents that they must follow, such as: how to be a good parent, what support they should provide for their child, their role in teaching their child hockey related skills, how they are to behave in the stands, what expectations they should have of the coach and how they are to relate to one another. Throughout the parents' experience in hockey, these norms form the hockey group and change the individual parent's behavior.

This research provides a new insight into the parental role in hockey. Coaches, Athletic Directors, parents, officials, organizing bodies and educators are all impacted by this research. With parents becoming ever more involved role in sports, it is important for all members of the sports community to understand this change and how it is affecting the sports community in both positive and negative ways. By understanding this shift in the parental role and the cult-like behavior that is required of sports parents, all members of the sports community will better be able to work in and plan for the new age of youth sports. In this section, I will examine the key implications for each respective sporting group resulting from my research.

## Youth Sports Organizations

Youth sports organizations provide the initial sports experience for many families. Many families enroll into youth sports unclear about the expectations for the child and/or parents. In light of this research study, youth sports organizations must provide more information through parent education. This education must include proper ways parents can: support, teach appropriate behavior, set guideline to allow their child to grow, protect their child, and control their own behavior. This early education will allow the parent to have guidelines around their need to be “good” parents and the organization will have more clear expectations for parents. Because sports have the ability to shape both the parent and the child, it is important for the youth organization to help the parent understand their role as an integral part of their child’s experience in sports.

Youth sports organizations also have to realize that parents have changed their focus from activities for their own enjoyment to focusing on their child’s activities. This change in adult focus results in a new form of parent with which youth organizations must work. The connections that are made in the hockey arena create valuable social capital for the parents and the community. The hockey family that is created can be seen as a benign cult because the connections are so strong within the community. Youth sports organizations can learn a lot about parental behavior by understanding the structure and sequence as to how the hockey family is formed. Through joining the community, becoming part of the family, developing friendships, perhaps getting shunned, and leaving the cult, cultic rites and rituals can be seen in the group’s interactions. By understanding this structure and sequence, youth sports organizations can develop programs that allow parents social needs to be met while providing the best sports atmosphere for the athletes.



Together with parents, youth organizations assure appropriate rites and rituals of the group must be developed. With effective youth organization oversight, these rites and rituals can support both the parents and the organization. Rites and rituals that should be developed by the organization and parents are: getting their kids to the game (and everything else), being financially devoted, doing their hockey “job”, observing proper rink behavior (or not), helping each other out, and participating in social gatherings. By clarifying and understanding each groups rites and rituals, youth sports organizations and parents can work together to make sure each child and parent has a positive experience in sports.

### **Athletic Directors**

Athletic Directors supervise Junior High and High School athletics. They often work with students who have already participated in a youth sports organization. Players and parents have already been initiated into the sports culture, through their youth sports experience, and have to adapt to the change at the Junior High and High School levels.

Athletic Directors must be aware of the dynamics of the youth sports association to be able to assist parents and athletes during the transition from one level to another. It is in both organizations best interests to ensure that open lines of communication are established between the organizations. Just like the youth level, parent’s central desire is to produce a child that is a successful adult. Parents use hockey to achieve this desire. Because of this, parents are an active part of the sports community. This continues at the high school level, but the level of parental commitment changes.

High school athletics requires a different level of commitment than the youth level requires. Athletic Directors must understand the cult-like rewards parents have experienced at

the youth level, and recognize that these rapidly fade away as their children join high school teams. Understanding that parents lose a sense of their social community will help Athletic Directors plan and work with high school parents to ease their transition into a new culture with its different expectations.

Athletic Directors must be aware of the dynamics that occur among parents when players are moved up a level before the rest of their teammates. When this occurs, parent groups are split and a schism occurs that can harm both the organization and ultimately the high school team. It is important for Athletic Directors to understand the implications this may have for a team, and be in communication with the youth sports organization to intercede for the good of both organizations. Athletic Directors must be active participants with the parents to help ease the tensions that traditionally develop within the parental groups.

## **Coaches**

Coaches are an integral part of sports participation. With the change in sports parents, coaches must be provided education and training to understand and work with the new sports parent. First, coaches must be willing to communicate openly with parents in a way that is different from traditional practice. Coaches must work with the parents to understand their needs and wants and be able to communicate about these topics. Conversations of this sort will venture into areas outside of the focus of hockey. By learning how to communicate with parents, the partnership between coach and parent will be more valuable.

Coaches and parents must effectively communicate about what they expect of each other. Coaches need to understand what parents want from the coach. Coaches do most of the work on the front-stage and parents support the coach in the backstage. Parents ultimately want their

children to be successful adults and use hockey as a tool to help teach their children the life skills needed. The lessons parents want their child to learn are lessons of: teamwork, hard work, sportsmanship, discipline, structure and responsibility.

Coaches must also work with the parents on parental expectations so that their child can learn life lessons. These are: be positive, be realistic, support their child, support the coach, and communicate as parent. It is important for the coach and parent to work together in both the front and back stage, so the child is receiving a consistent message from both the coach and the parent. Currently, these conversations occur in the backstage, but a change must be made by coaches and these conversations must be brought into the front stage at parent meetings.

Coaches also must be aware that parental roles change as children progress through the levels of hockey. Parents are not afforded the knowledge as to what their role is at each level. Coaches must be more direct in teaching the parents their place on the team. By understanding the social relationships that are created through youth sports, coaches can help the parents navigate their roles.

## **Parents**

Parents are the original educators of their children. Ultimately, parents want what is best for their child and use sports as an atmosphere for their child to grow. When initially entering into youth sports, parents are unaware as to how sports will shape both the parent and the child. It is important for parents to be educated during the early years of youth sports as to: the hockey community, the commitment that is required, the roles they must play and how hockey can help them teach their child the lessons needed for life.

Parents must also be taught about their own experience with hockey. In this research, it is clear that parents play many dramaturgical roles. These roles affect their behavior both in the stands and away from the hockey arena. Parents must be made aware of how they have control over the role that they are playing. Currently, one area that specifically needs to be addressed with parents is how the way the child plays his part on the hockey stage becomes a sign of success for the parents. This needs to be brought to parents' attention so that they can be in control of their role, and actively work to ensure that when they see behavior on the rink which they do not like, that they do not turn it into a negative sign on their parental role.

Parents and coaches must work together to effectively communicate with one another. Parents must be able to express to the coach their expectations, such as: improve their child's hockey skills, be in control and coach, communicate with the athletes, communicate early with the parents, and assign playing time for their child. Setting clear expectation and guidelines between the parent and coach will allow for more effective communication.

The role parent's play in sports has changed. Parents must be willing to become active members of a social group that is formed because of their child's participation in hockey. Parents must understand that they must participate in the rites and rituals to remain a part of the group including: getting their kids to the game (and everything else), being financially devoted, doing their hockey "job", observing proper rink behavior (or not), helping each other out, and participating in social gatherings. Although this is difficult to discuss in the early sessions of participation, it is important to discuss these social connections as parents move through the youth levels. This will help parents to see their place in the sport's atmosphere.

Parents also must be made aware of the social connections which they will make through hockey. Parents have changed their focus from activities for their own enjoyment to focusing on their child's activities. Because of this parents are more involved in their child's sports than ever. By analyzing the hockey family and looking at the way it is developed, there is a structure and sequence as to how these groups are formed. From joining the community to becoming part of the family, developing friendships, perhaps getting shunned, and leaving the cult, cultic rites and rituals can be seen in the groups interactions. It is important for parents to understand the life of the social group and how it becomes like a benign cult. This is especially important for coaches at the Bantam level to discuss with parents as they prepare to transition to the High School level.

### **Officials**

Officials have to deal with many new challenges with the change in parental behavior. Understanding the role parents now play in the hockey community, will help them understand some of the expected parental behavior. Officials must understand that parents are using hockey to teach the skills that they want their children to learn. They see their child behavior as a direct indicator of their parenting success. When a player does something wrong on the ice, parents see it as a direct reflection of themselves. It is important for officials to understand the changing role of the parent in order to fully understand the behavior which they see in the stands.

### **Educators**

Educators can utilize many of the aspects of this research to gain a better understanding of the parents with whom they currently work in the educational setting. By understanding the changing needs and wants of parents in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, educators can more effectively

communicate with parents. Understanding the roles parents play on both the front stage and backstage allows educators to gain an understanding into parental behavior.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

As a coach, teacher and school administrator, I can think of many angles from which to follow up this study in order to learn more about sports parents in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Considering that this was an exploratory study, there are many research topics that would add to the literature. The following are topics that can build upon the research in this study in order to gain a more thorough understanding of sports parents.

- Studying multiple Bantam programs during the same season.

Through study of multiple programs the research from this study would be expanded beyond this single case. This would help establish a more generalized understanding of hockey parents in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Because of the exploratory nature of this study, it is difficult to state whether the same results found in this study would be seen in other team.

- Studying other sports to see if parenting dynamics follow a similar dynamic to this study.

Different sports require different amounts of commitment from parents. Group sports, such as: soccer, baseball, football, etc. have different parenting dynamics than individual sports, such as: golf, tennis, cross country, etc. By studying other sports, the information found in this study can be expanded to include many other sports, and the literature on sports parents will be expanded.

- Studying a girls' sports program to see if the parenting dynamics follow a similar dynamic to this study.

Boys' and girls' sports have different histories, including girls' sports becoming more mainstream after the Title IX law went into effect in 1972. To this day, boys still have many more opportunities to participate in sports on a professional level. Because of these differences, it is important to study the parenting dynamics of a girl's team to see if it follows a similar dynamic to this study.

- Studying a group of players and parents, starting when they join at mini-mites through high school, to analyze the parent's dynamics over the course of their participation.

Using a longitudinal approach to study parents over the entire course of their child's hockey participation from mini-mites through high school will allow a much great insight into parenting dynamics. Throughout the longitudinal study it would be important to study changes in parental relationships, how bonds are formed among groups and what role the association plays in parental development to name a few pertinent areas. This type of study would expand the literature on sports parenting with a greater insight into how time affects parental dynamics.

- Studying a group of parents whose children have completed hockey participation, discovering what they do to replace the communal feelings they had when they were actively involved.

Once children have stopped playing hockey, the traditional connections parents had developed through the team naturally dissolve. In this study, this is something that parents do not look forward to happening. By studying parents whose children have completed hockey participation, a better understanding would be gained as to what these parents do to replace the time and communal feelings which they had when their children participated in hockey.

- How long does it take for hockey cults to develop norms for the group?

In this study, it was shown that hockey cults develop norms for each of their individual groups. To further understand these group norms, hockey parents must be studied during the earlier years of participation to: fully understand how these norms are formed, who active participants in forming these norms are and how long it takes for the group to establish these norms. This will help expand the literature on the formation of cult groups in sports and afford a greater understanding of parental dynamics at the early stages of hockey participation.

As this was an exploratory study, more research needs to be done on this topic to develop a thorough image of what a 21<sup>st</sup> century sports parent really looks like. Parental roles, responsibilities, and personal rewards must be clearly understood. Through continued study of sports parents, a more thorough understanding of parental expectations and their personal investment will be understood. This will enable athletic programmers to have a more clear comprehension of parental behavior and be able to utilize this information as they plan for their seasons.



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## Appendix A: Recruitment Letter

August 20, 2010

Dear Hockey Parent,

You are invited to participate in a research study about sports parents conducted by Clare Grundtner Koch, a graduate student in the Doctorate in Leadership program at the University of Saint Thomas. You were selected as a possible participant in this research project because you are the parent of a hockey athlete in \_\_\_\_\_.

The purpose of this study is to learn how you, as parents, interpret the meaning of your child's participation in sports and how does it differs between individuals. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in 2-3 semi-structured interviews at a location of your choosing. This will allow me to analyze changes throughout the season and ask follow-up questions. These interviews will take no more than an hour to complete. I will be audiotaping the interviews in order to create a transcript to help me with analysis.

If you would like to participate in this study, please fill out the attached interest form and return it to Clare Grundtner Koch, researcher, tonight or e-mail Clare at [cegrundtner@stthoams.edu](mailto:cegrundtner@stthoams.edu) within the next week with the information on the bottom of this form to show your interest. I have included some interview questions that I am planning to ask to give you an idea of what kinds of topics we will cover in the interview. The study has minimal risks as you may share sensitive information about your family. However your identity will be concealed and you have the option to withdraw from the study at any time. There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study.

Signing this form only implies an interest in doing interviews. A select number of parents will be selected from each team. You may decline to participate in an interview at any time in the process. I anticipate doing the interviews during the 2010-2011 hockey season and into the spring.

The administration of \_\_\_\_\_ High School and The \_\_\_\_\_ Youth Hockey Association has reviewed the study materials and has lent their support to this project. The project has also been approved by the University of Saint Thomas Institutional Review Boards.

Thank you for taking the time to consider being part of this project. Participation in this project is entirely voluntary. It will not affect your future relations with \_\_\_\_\_ High School, \_\_\_\_\_ Youth Hockey Association, or the University of Saint Thomas, in any way. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at 651-235-9153 or the University of Saint Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-5341.

Sincerely yours,

Clare Grundtner Koch

Hockey Parent Interview Interest Form

I would be interested in finding out more about participating in interviews for this project. Please contact me to tell me more about the process and procedures involved in the interviews for this project. I understand that I will not get involved in any interviews until everything is fully explained to me and that I agree to participate.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_

City and zip code \_\_\_\_\_

Day phone number \_\_\_\_\_

Email address (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for considering being part of this research.

## **Appendix B: Introductory Script at Parents Meeting**

Hello. My name is Clare Grundtner Koch and I am a graduate student in the Doctoral Leadership Program at the University of Saint Thomas. I am here today because I have requested to work with your team to learn more about sports parents. I will be attending parent meetings and games throughout the year. I ask that if you see me, please invite me into your conversations. Simply having me sit next to you at a game will give me great insight into your viewpoint. Through my research, I will also be conducting semi-structured interviews. I am here today to request your participation in those interviews.

Specifically the goal of my research is to learn how you, as parents, interpret the meaning of your child's participation in sports and how does it differs between individuals.

If you participate in this project, you will take part in semi-structured interview about your expectations, beliefs and values of being a sports parent. Two to three interviews will be conducted with each participant over the course of the 2010-2011 hockey season. This will allow me to analyze changes throughout the season and ask follow-up questions. The interviews will be audiotaped and last no more than one hour each. They will take place at a location and time of your choosing.

Do you have any questions about the project or what is going to happen if you participate?

## **Appendix C: Consent Forms**

### **Parent CONSENT FORM**

#### **UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS**

#### Screams from the Stands: Hockey Parents Performance in the Sports Arena

#### **IRB #B10-220-02**

I am conducting a study about parents and how they interpret their role as a parent of an athlete. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because you are the parent of a hockey player in \_\_\_\_\_. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Clare Grundtner Koch, Doctoral student at St. Thomas University and Donald LaMageleine, Chair, St. Thomas University Department of Education.

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is: In recent years, youth sports have experienced a significant change in parental behavior. Parents are increasingly investing in outside coaching for their child, encouraging their child to participate in their sport year round, attending all practices and games, investing thousands of dollars into the sport, and telling the coach how they should coach the team. In this study, I intend to explore this parental behavior and its effect on youth sports.

I will be conducting semi-structured interviews with hockey parents and observing their behavior at hockey events. The goal of my research is to examine how parents interpret the meaning of their children's participation in sports and how does it differs between individuals?

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things: participants will participate in semi-structured interviews. These interviews will take place over a 1 year timeframe with each participant participating in at least two sessions, ideally three sessions. These sessions will take place in a convenient location for both participant and researcher (i.e. coffee shop, school, home, etc.) and will last no more than one hour. Finally, I will observe the the two hockey programs at games and hockey events. This data collection will take place at the hockey arena or appropriate venue the coach has chosen. I will observe a minimum of three games for each of the teams to gather research. Data will be collected both in writing and through an audio recorder.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:** The study has risks associated. The risk being the possible invasion of privacy of subject or family. To minimize the risk to participants, I will use pseudonyms throughout the research. All information will be kept confidential. Participants will

have the opportunity at any time to withdraw from the research or request certain information not be included in the final research study.

The direct benefits you will receive for participating are: There are no direct benefits.

### **Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way. The types of records I will create include recordings and transcripts. The information will be stored at Clare Grundtner Koch's home on a locked computer and in a locked file cabinet. Within one month of publication of the dissertation all records will be destroyed. Estimated date of completion is May 2012. Only Clare Grundtner Koch (principal researcher), Donald LaMagdeleine (research chair) and the transcriber will have access to the original interviews.

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect you or your child's current or future relations with \_\_\_\_\_ High School, \_\_\_\_\_ Youth Hockey Association or the University of St. Thomas. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time up to and until data collection has been completed (approximately May 2011). Should you decide to withdraw data collected about you will not be included in the final study results. You are also free to skip any questions I may ask.

### **Contacts and Questions**

My name is Clare Grundtner Koch. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 651-235-9153. My research advisor is Donald LaMagdeleine and he may be reached at 651-962-4893. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-5341 with any questions or concerns.

**You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.**

### **Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study. I am at least 18 years of age. I agree to have my interviews audio taped and transcribed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Study Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Print Name of Study Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Researcher**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**



## **Coach CONSENT FORM**

### **UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS**

#### Screams from the Stands: Hockey Parents Performance in the Sports Arena

#### **IRB #B10-220-02**

I am conducting a study about parents and how they interpret their role as a parent of an athlete. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because you are the coach of a hockey team in \_\_\_\_\_. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Clare Grundtner Koch, Doctoral student at St. Thomas University and Donald LaMageleine, Chair, St. Thomas University Department of Education.

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is: In recent years, youth sports have experienced a significant change in parental behavior. Parents are increasingly investing in outside coaching for their child, encouraging their child to participate in their sport year round, attending all practices and games, investing thousands of dollars into the sport, and telling the coach how they should coach the team. In this study, I intend to explore this parental behavior and its effect on youth sports.

I will be conducting semi-structured interviews with coaches, hockey parents and observing their behavior at hockey events. The goal of my research is to examine how parents interpret the meaning of their children's participation in sports and how does it differs between individuals?

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things: participants will participate in semi-structured interviews. These interviews will take place over a 1 year timeframe with each participant participating in at least two sessions, ideally three sessions. These sessions will take place in a convenient location for both participant and researcher (i.e. coffee shop, school, home, etc.) and will last no more than one hour. Finally, I will observe the two hockey programs at games and hockey events. This data collection will take place at the hockey arena or appropriate venue the coach has chosen. I will observe a minimum of three games for each of the teams to gather research. Data will be collected both in writing and through an audio recorder.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:** The study has risks associated. The risk being the possible invasion of privacy of subject or family. To minimize the risk to participants, I will use

pseudonyms throughout the research. All information will be kept confidential. Participants will have the opportunity at any time to withdraw from the research or request certain information not be included in the final research study.

The direct benefits you will receive for participating are: There are no direct benefits.

### **Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way. The types of records I will create include recordings and transcripts. The information will be stored at Clare Grundtner Koch's home on a locked computer and in a locked file cabinet. Within one month of publication of the dissertation all records will be destroyed. Estimated date of completion is May 2012. Only Clare Grundtner Koch (principal researcher), Donald LaMagdeleine (research chair) and the transcriber will have access to the original interviews.

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with \_\_\_\_\_ High School, \_\_\_\_\_ Youth Hockey Association or the University of St. Thomas. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time up to and until data collection has been completed (approximately May 2011). Should you decide to withdraw data collected about you will not be included in the final study results. You are also free to skip any questions I may ask.

### **Contacts and Questions**

My name is Clare Grundtner Koch. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 651-235-9153. My research advisor is Donald LaMagdeleine and he may be reached at 651-962-4893. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-5341 with any questions or concerns.

**You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.**

### **Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study. I am at least 18 years of age. I agree to have my interviews audio taped and transcribed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Study Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Print Name of Study Participant**



**Signature of Researcher**

**Date**

**Parent Observer CONSENT FORM**  
**UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS**

Screams from the Stands: Hockey Parents Performance in the Sports Arena  
**IRB #B10-220-02**

I am conducting a study about parents and how they interpret their role as a parent of an athlete. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because you are the parent of a hockey player in \_\_\_\_\_. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Clare Grundtner Koch, Doctoral student at St. Thomas University and Donald LaMageleine, Chair, St. Thomas University Department of Education.

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is: In recent years, youth sports have experienced a significant change in parental behavior. Parents are increasingly investing in outside coaching for their child, encouraging their child to participate in their sport year round, attending all practices and games, investing thousands of dollars into the sport, and telling the coach how they should coach the team. In this study, I intend to explore this parental behavior and its effect on youth sports.

I will be observing parental behavior at hockey events. The goal of my research is to examine how parents interpret the meaning of their children's participation in sports and how does it differs between individuals?

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things: I will observe the two hockey programs at games and hockey events. This data collection will take place at the hockey arena or appropriate venue the coach has chosen. I will observe a minimum of three games for each of the teams to gather research. Data will be collected both in writing and through an audio recorder.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:** The study has risks associated. The risk being the possible invasion of privacy of subject or family. To minimize the risk to participants, I will use pseudonyms throughout the research. All information will be kept confidential. Participants will have the opportunity at any time to withdraw from the research or request certain information not be included in the final research study.

The direct benefits you will receive for participating are: There are no direct benefits.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way. The types of records I will create include recordings and transcripts. The information will be stored at Clare Grundtner Koch's home on a locked computer and in a locked file cabinet. Within one month of publication of the dissertation all records will be destroyed. Estimated date of completion is May 2012. Only Clare Grundtner Koch (principal researcher), Donald LaMagdeleine (research chair) and the transcriber will have access to the original interviews.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect you or your child's current or future relations with \_\_\_\_\_ High School, \_\_\_\_\_ Youth Hockey Association or the University of St. Thomas. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time up to and until data collection has been completed (approximately May 2011). Should you decide to withdraw data collected about you will not be included in the final study results. You are also free to skip any questions I may ask.

**Contacts and Questions**

My name is Clare Grundtner Koch. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 651-235-9153. My research advisor is Donald LaMagdeleine and he may be reached at 651-962-4893. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-5341 with any questions or concerns.

**You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.**

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study. I am at least 18 years of age. I agree to have my interviews audio taped and transcribed.

---

**Signature of Study Participant**


---

**Date**


---

**Print Name of Study Participant**


---

**Signature of Researcher**


---

**Date**

## **Appendix D: Informational Handout to Midway School Administration**

### **Screams from the Stands: Hockey Parents Performance in the Sports Arena**

Researcher: Clare Grundtner Koch

University of St. Thomas

651-235-9153

#### **Problem Statement**

In recent years, youth sports have experienced a significant change in parental behavior. Parents are increasingly investing in outside coaching for their child, encouraging their child to participate in their sport year round, attending all practices and games, investing thousands of dollars into the sport and telling the coach how they should coach the team. In this study, I intend to explore this behavior and its effect on youth sports.

#### **Problem Significance**

Not much research has been done analyzing parental behavior in youth sports. The research that has been done looks at areas such as: the child's experience with socialization on a team, learning new physical skills and the role sport's plays a in a child's upbringing. The changing American family, the changing sports arena, and an openness of parents to express their expectations and demands all have contributed to the change in the youth sports' atmosphere. With the influx of news headlines broadcasting inappropriate parental behavior at sporting events, I want to further the knowledge on parents, because I feel they are a crucial part to a positive sports experience.

#### **Ideal Research Sites**

The Midway High School Hockey Team

## Midway Youth Hockey Bantam Team

### School's Role

- Approval from the school.
- Access to the coach and team.
- Ability to interview the coach.
- Ability to interview the Athletic Director.
- Ability to contact parents during a pre-season meeting to gain volunteers to interview. At this time name and phone numbers will be obtained from the individual parents who volunteer for the research.
- Ability to attend practices and games to observe the parents.

### Precautions to Protect School, Participants and Researcher

- All names and places will be changed to protect identity.
- Waivers will be signed by all interview participants, before the interview takes place, with information stating each of their individual rights.
- Each participant has the ability to withdraw at anytime during the research process.
- Qualitative research code of ethics and Minnesota teacher's code of ethics will be followed during all research.
- Research must be approved by the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board.
- Research will be overseen by Dr. Donald LaMagdeleine, Chair of St. Thomas Leadership, Policy and Administration Department and chair of my personal research.

## **Appendix E- Interview Questions**

### Consent Questions:

- What is the study about?
- Can you explain what you will be asked to do in the study?
- Please explain the risks involved in this study.
- How will your information be kept confidential?
- What is your understanding of the voluntary nature of this study?
- What are your concerns about participating in this study?

### Coach Questions: Interview 1

- Can you please give me a brief description of your playing and coaching experience?
- How many years have you been coaching?
- What do you feel is the role of the sports parent?
- Have you ever had an altercation with a parent? Please describe.
- What are the top few complaints you receive from parents on a regular basis?
- Do you feel that parents have become more involved in child's athletics both positive and negative? Explain why you believe this to be so.
- As a parent yourself, do you ever feel when you are at one of their athletic events that you could possibly lose control?
- Is there anything else when dealing with parents and athletics that I haven't asked that is coming to mind at this point in time?

## Coach Questions: Interview 2

- Please tell me your reflection of the season this year.
- At the beginning of the season you asked a few 9<sup>th</sup> grade players to play HS. Please tell me how that process went.
  - o How did you decide who to pick?
  - o When did you talk to parents/players?
- How many Bantum players have traditionally played HS in the past?
- How do you feel the transition for these players went?
- How do you feel the parents of these Bantum players were welcomed into the HS parents?
- What role does the hockey parent play?
- What is your coaching philosophy?
- What were the main concerns from parents this year?
- On average, how many HS players go on to play Junior's?
- Anything else?



Parent Questions: Interview 1

- Can you please tell me about yourself ?
- Can you tell me about your experience of being the parent of an athlete?
- What are the lessons do you want your child to learn from sports?
- What do you find rewarding about being the parent of an athlete?
- Can you tell me about your relationships with your child's coaches?
- What do you feel are the boundaries as the parent of an athlete?
- How do you feel parents should behave at sporting events?
- Do you feel that you have always behaved in the manner you describe?
- What do you see as the biggest triggers of parents losing control of their emotions or behaviors at sporting events?

### Parent Questions: Interview 2

- What was your reflection of the season?
- What personally motivates you to be engaged in your child's sport?
- What would you tell a neighbor or a friend who was interested in having their child start playing hockey?
- What have you gained by having your child participate in hockey?
- What have you lost by having your child participate in hockey?
- What do you personally do to support the team?
- How have you felt welcomed over the years into the hockey community?
- What does it mean to be a hockey parent?
- If you had a problem with a hockey parent, how would you handle the situation?
- What else do I need to know about this year or just sports parents in general?
- Anything else you would like to share?

October 11, 2010



Dear Clare,

**IRB Proposal #B10-220-02 - Screams from the Stands: Hockey parents Performance in the Sports Arena - Expedited**  
**Researcher: Clare Koch**  
**Advisor: Dr. Don R. LaMagdeleine**

Full Status Approval

Your application for your proposed research involving human subjects has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board of the University of St. Thomas and been given Full Approval Status. Your application has satisfied all of the criteria necessary for full status. This means that you may proceed with your research immediately. This is your official letter of approval.

Please place the IRB log number on all of your future correspondence regarding this protocol.

Please note that under IRB Policy principal investigators are required to report to the IRB for further review when changes in the research protocol increase the risks to the rights and welfare of human subjects involved in the study and /or in the event of any adverse episode (e.g. actual harm, breach of confidentiality) involving human subjects.

Thank you for all of your work. All of the changes and submissions fulfill the protocol approval process.

Please contact me if I can be of further assistance.

Best wishes as you begin your research.

Eleni

Eleni Roulis, Ph.D.  
Institutional Review Board Chair  
2115 Summit Avenue #5037  
St. Paul, MN 55105  
Aquinas 314A  
651-962-5341  
e9roulis@stthomas.edu

## Youth Hockey Association

8-13-2010

To Whom It May Concern,

This is to acknowledge that I have given doctoral student Clare Grundtner Koch (researcher), with the University of St. Thomas, permission and access to the Youth Hockey Association to observe practices, games and to recruit subjects for her dissertation project, "Screams from the Stands: Hockey Parents Performance in the Sports Arena." Youth Hockey Association has agreed to help identify and allow Clare Grundtner Koch to distribute recruitment letters to possible subjects and will support her in gathering information pertaining to the project. The subjects will participate in this project at their discretion and their participation will not affect their involvement with the Youth Hockey Association.

Coaching Coordinator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Scott Goodman", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Scott Goodman

## HIGH SCHOOL

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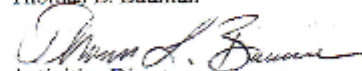
August 20, 2010

To Whom It May Concern,

This is to acknowledge that I have given doctoral student Clare Grundtner Koch (researcher), with the University of St. Thomas, permission and access to the High School boys hockey program to observe practices, games and to recruit subjects for her dissertation project, "Screams from the Stands: Hockey Parents Performance in the Sports Arena." High School has agreed to help identify and allow Clare Grundtner Koch to distribute recruitment letters to possible subjects and will support her in gathering information pertaining to the project. The subjects will participate in this project at their discretion and their participation will not affect their involvement with the

High School hockey program or High School.

Thomas L. Bauman

  
Activities Director  
High School

## TRANSCRIBER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

### UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

#### Screams from the Stands: Hockey Parents Performance in the Sports Arena

IRB log number: B10-220-02

I, Andrea Berg, agree to transcribe data for this study. I agree that I will:

1. keep all research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) with anyone other than Clare Grundtner Koch, the primary investigator of this study;
2. keep all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) secure while it is in my possession. This includes:
  - using closed headphones when transcribing audiotaped interviews;
  - keeping all transcript documents and digitized interviews in computer password protected files;
  - closing any transcription programs and documents when temporarily away from the computer;
  - keeping any printed transcripts in a secure location such as a locked file cabinet; and
  - permanently deleting any e-mail communication containing the data;
3. give all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) to the primary investigator when I have completed the research tasks;
4. erase or destroy all research information in any form or format that is not returnable to the primary investigator (e.g., information stored on my computer hard drive) upon completion of the research tasks.

Andrea Schuss

Signature of transcriber

11-16-10

Date

Clare Koch

Signature of researcher

11-16-10

Date

**TRANSCRIBER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT**  
**UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS**

**Screams from the Stands: Hockey Parents Performance in the Sports Arena**

IRB log number: B10-220-02

I, (name), agree to transcribe data for this study. I agree that I will:

1. keep all research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) with anyone other than Clare Grundtner Koch, the primary investigator of this study;
2. keep all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) secure while it is in my possession. This includes:
  - using closed headphones when transcribing audiotaped interviews;
  - keeping all transcript documents and digitized interviews in computer password-protected files;
  - closing any transcription programs and documents when temporarily away from the computer;
  - keeping any printed transcripts in a secure location such as a locked file cabinet; and
  - permanently deleting any e-mail communication containing the data;
3. give all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) to the primary investigator when I have completed the research tasks;
4. erase or destroy all research information in any form or format that is not returnable to the primary investigator (e.g., information stored on my computer hard drive) upon completion of the research tasks.

Cathy Grundtner  
 Signature of transcriber

4/4/11  
 Date

Clare Koch  
 Signature of researcher

4/5/11  
 Date